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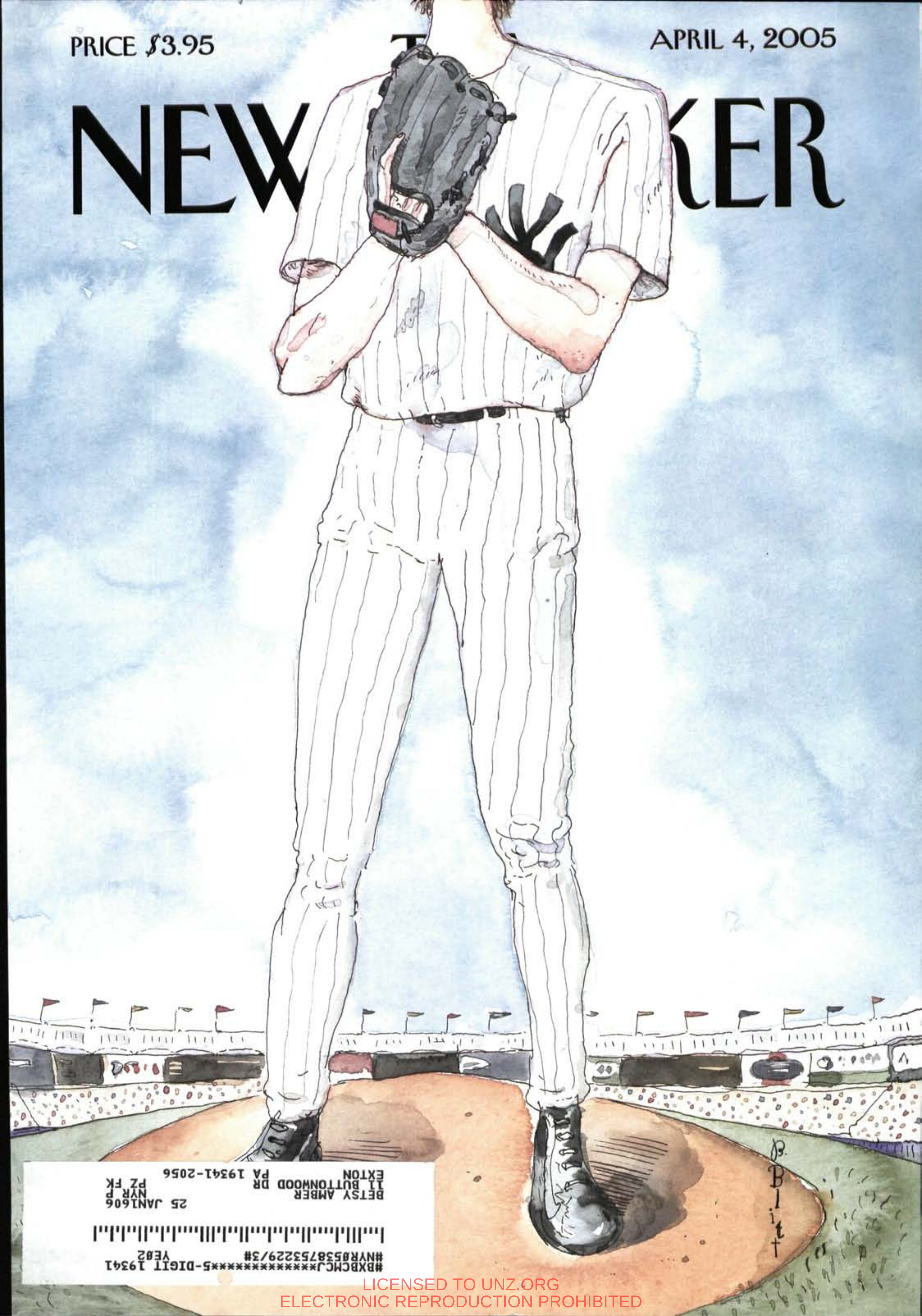
THE NEW YORKER



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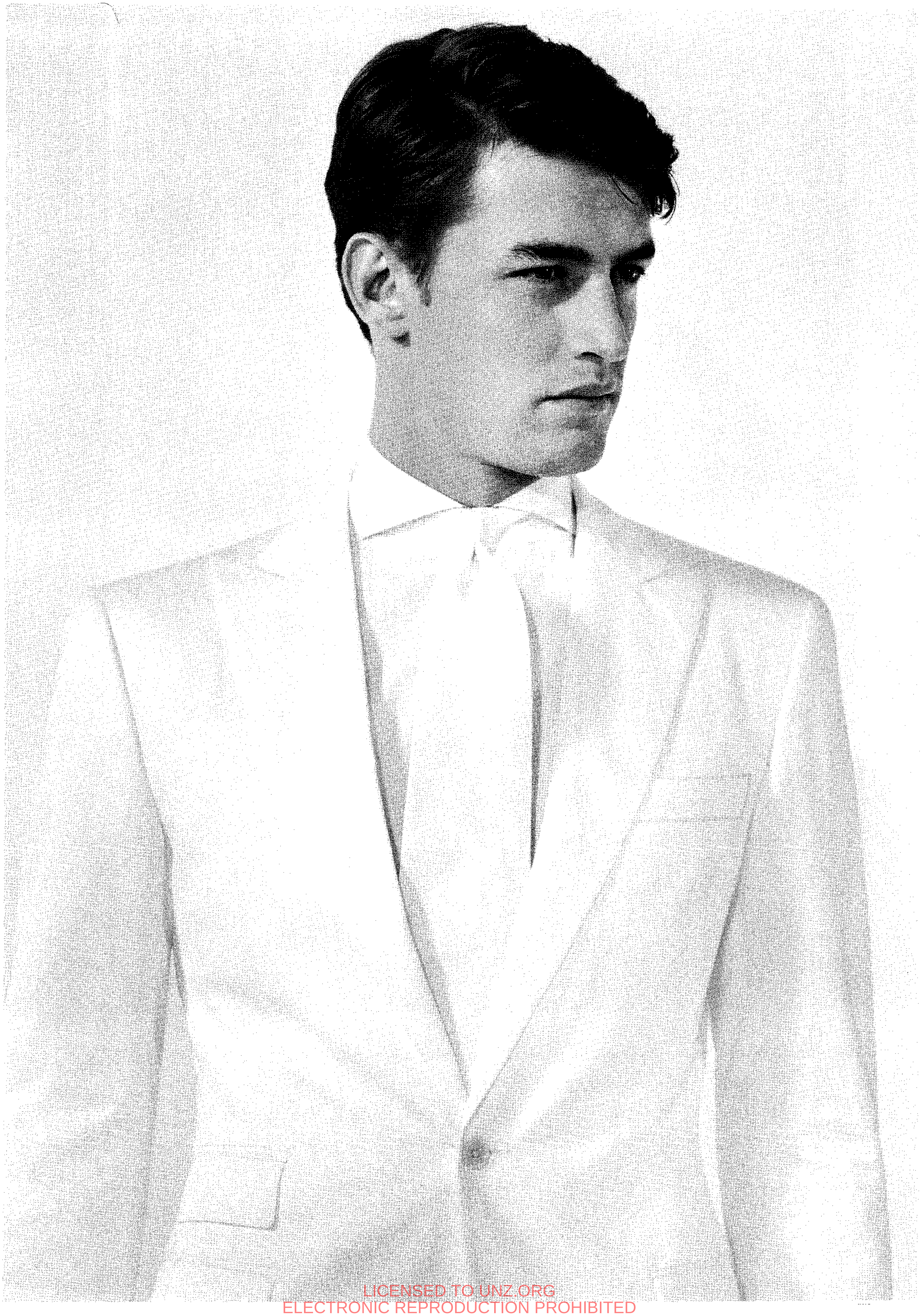

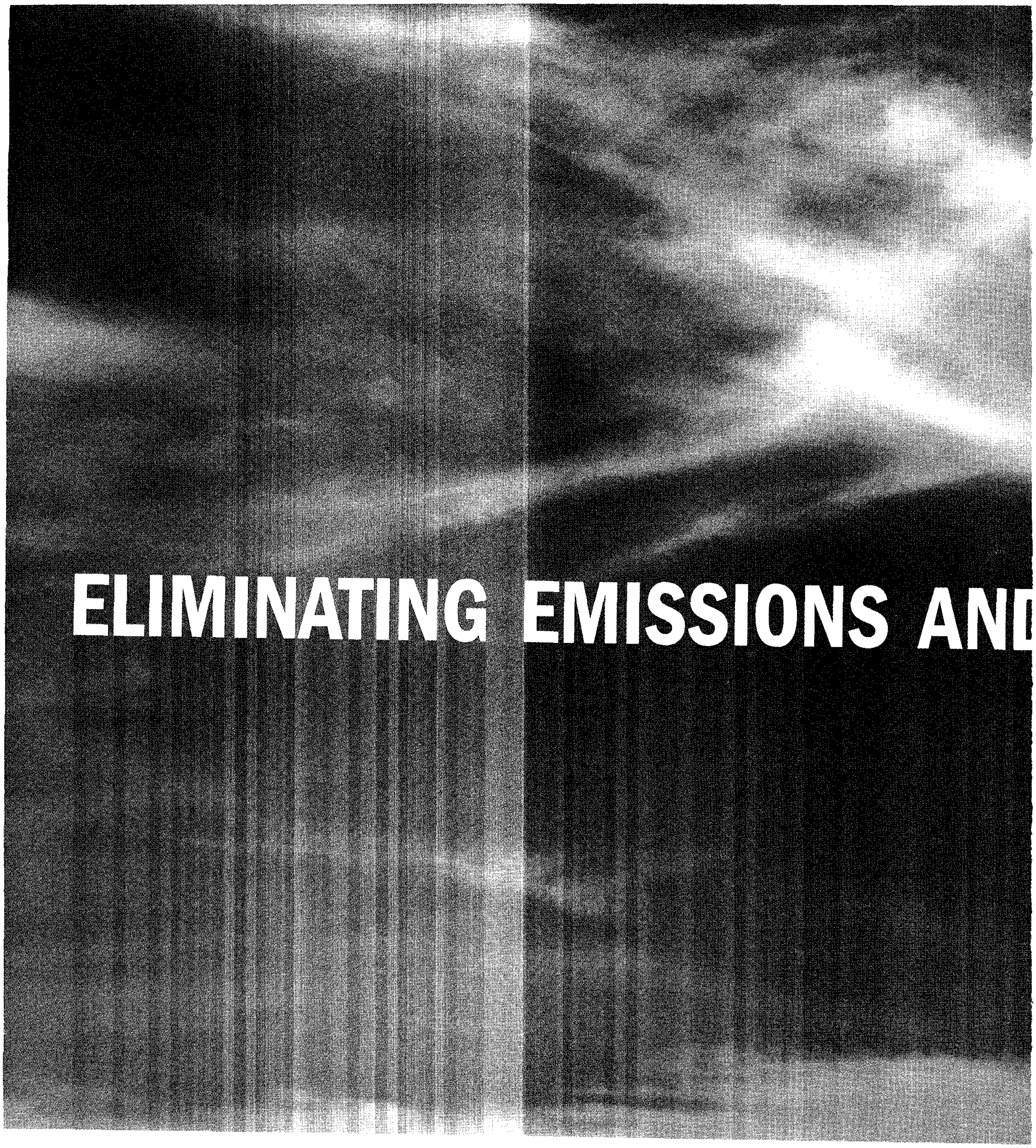

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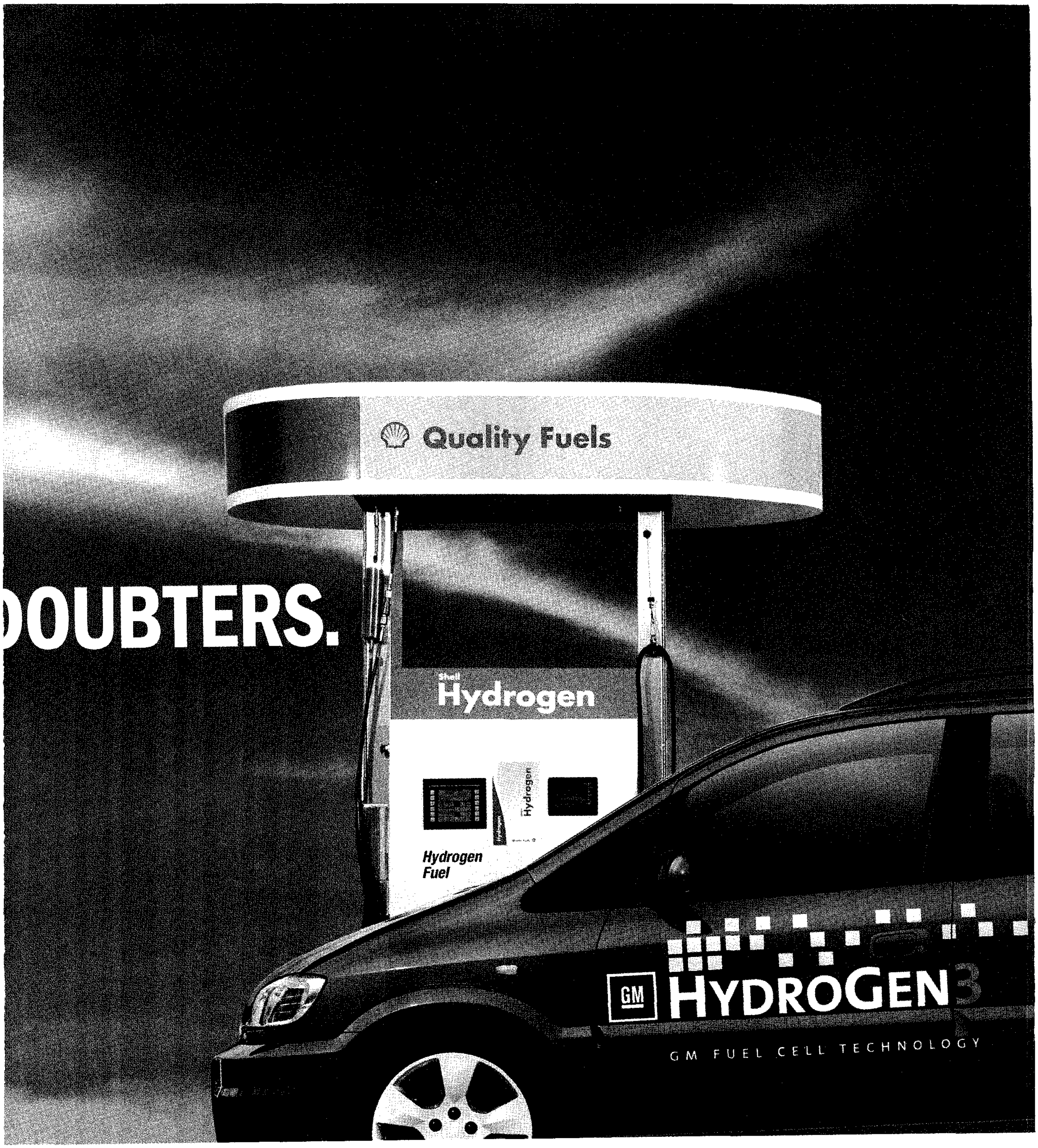
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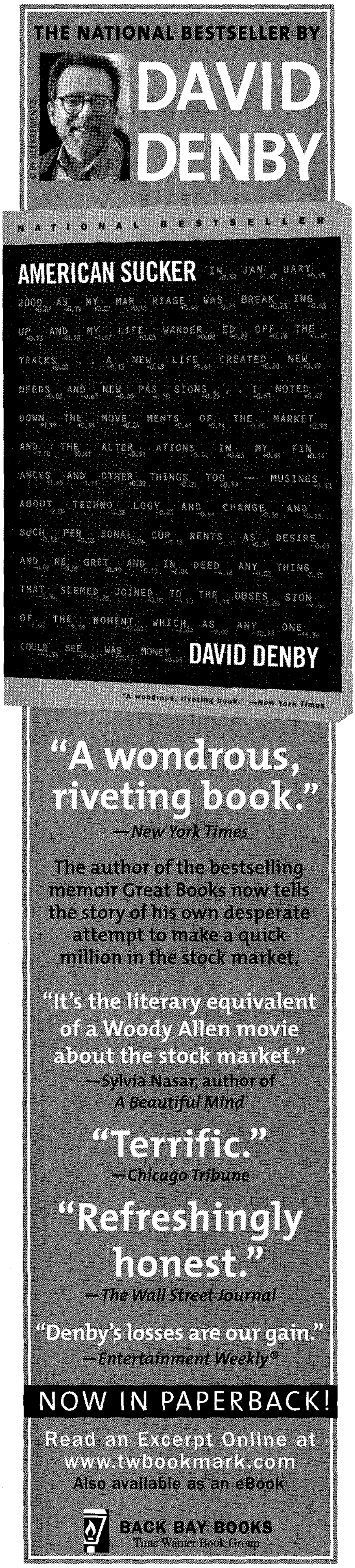
THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER BY
DAVID DENBY

NATIONAL BESTSELLER
AMERICAN SUCKER
IN JANUARY 2000, AS MY MARRIAGE WAS BREAKING UP AND MY LIFE WANDERED OFF THE TRACKS, A NEW LIFE CREATED NEW NEEDS AND NEW PASSIONS. I NOTED DOWN THE MOVEMENTS OF THE MARKET AND THE ALTERATIONS IN MY FINANCES AND OTHER THINGS TOO — MUSINGS ABOUT TECHNOLOGY AND CHANGE AND SUCH PERSONAL CURRENTS AS DESIRE AND REGRET AND INDEED ANYTHING THAT SEEMED JOINED TO THE OBSESSION OF THE MOMENT, WHICH AS ANYONE COULD SEE WAS MONEY.
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CONTRIBUTORS

John Cassidy ("Bloomberg's Game," p. 56), the author of "Dot.Con," has been writing for the magazine since 1995.

Mark Singer (The Talk of the Town, p. 38) has a new book, "Character Studies: Encounters with the Curiously Obsessed," coming out in July.

Atul Gawande ("Piecework," p. 44) is assistant professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School and the author of "Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science."

Henry Alford (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 54) has published two humor books, including "Municipal Bondage."

Barry Blitt (Cover) has done the illustrations for a children's book entitled "Once Upon a Time, the End," which comes out in November.

Mary Oliver (Poem, p. 65) is the author of fourteen collections of poems, including the recent "Blue Iris."

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Donald Antrim (Fiction, p. 78) is working on a memoir. His most recent novel is "The Verificationist."

Adam Gopnik (Books, p. 88) is the author of "Paris to the Moon."

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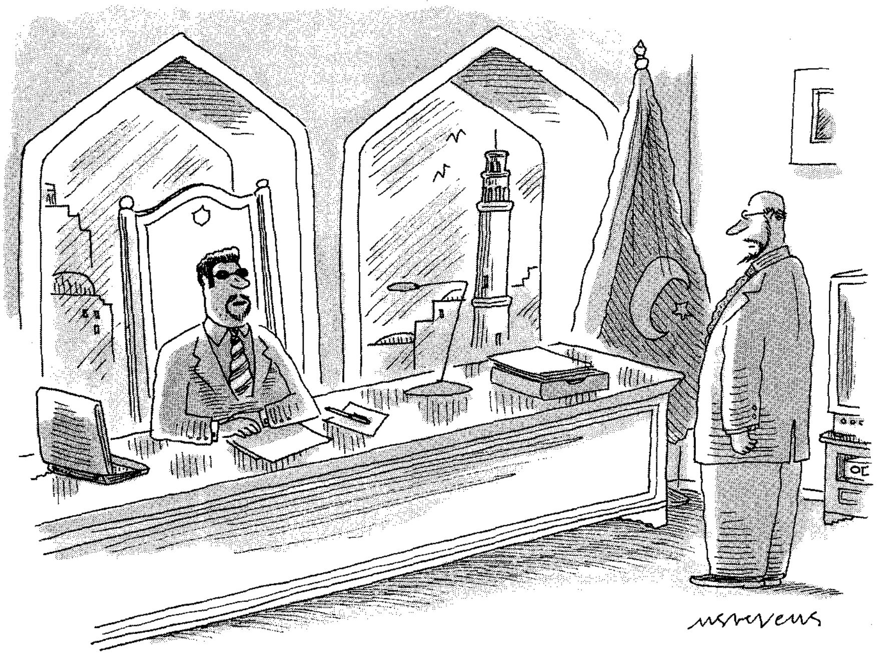
Joan Acocella (Dancing, p. 96) reviews books and dance for the magazine.

Hilton Als (The Theatre, p. 102), a staff writer, has recently completed a Holtzbrinck fellowship at the American Academy in Berlin.

Mark Alan Stamaty (The Back Page, p. 106) is a cartoonist and illustrator, and the author of "Who Needs Donuts?" and "Alia's Mission." ♦



"Tell Washington we've lost Osama bin What's-His-Name's trail."

THE MAIL

GETTING THE BLACK DEATH

Joan Acocella's account of the Black Death summarizes various theories about the so-called "Second Pandemic" of the fourteenth century and accepts the conclusion, widely endorsed by medical experts and scholars, that it was bubonic plague (Books, March 21st). However, it is worth noting some medical and historical findings that suggest otherwise. Black Death spread much more rapidly than modern plague does, killed many more people, and achieved infection rates inconsistent with what we know of transmission from rats to fleas to humans. During 1348, at least fifty thousand people in Florence died. Over a similar period in 1901, when confirmed bubonic plague struck Cape Town, a city about the size of medieval Florence, it carried off fewer than four hundred souls. There is, of course, evidence on the other side: in 2000, a French group reported that it had cloned the DNA of *Yersinia pestis* (the bacillus that causes bubonic plague) from the teeth of Black Death victims buried in Montpellier. But last year a larger, and arguably better-controlled, study of dozens of burials failed to yield a single positive specimen. This unresolved controversy is the concern not merely of historians and biologists but also of politicians. If the Black Death was bubonic plague, it is argued, then plague is a major bioterrorism threat and merits the millions being poured into researching it. If not, then we are left with the pressing question of what the Black Death actually was.

J. John Cohen
Professor of Immunology and Medicine
University of Colorado Medical School
Denver, Colo.

Acocella's essay on the Black Death quotes a well-known passage from Boccaccio's "Decameron" describing the social disintegration that ensued when the disease struck Florence, seven centuries ago. Yet, despite the undeniable impact of the collapse of trade, the immense loss of life, and the mass exodus of the well-to-do, there is some evidence that those who, whether out of necessity or choice, stayed in cities during the epidemic of the thirteen-forties managed to keep society functioning, by distributing food and aid and by conducting burials and religious services. In our recent study of the London plague of 1665—written from our respective backgrounds in medical microbiology and early modern history—we were struck by institutional records of relief operations and burials, as well as by the testimony of individuals, all of which point to an extraordinary ability to cope under horrendous conditions.

Dorothy C. Moote and A. Lloyd Moote
Princeton, N.J.

AMERICAN HEROES

Calvin Trillin's article on First Lieutenant Brian Slavenas, the Guardsman killed in Iraq, is a reminder that such noble and accomplished young men represent a tradition that is distinctively American ("Lost Son," March 14th). During the Second World War, Slavenas would have been called a "ninety-day wonder"—a term that referred to the three-month process that turned young men into officers. These officers navigated L.S.T.s across the Pacific and led marines ashore on Tarawa, Saipan, and Iwo Jima. In addition to heroism, the contributions of many of these officers had an added dimension. The men were innovative and independent—in the military, but not of the military. In modern management terms, one could say that their intellectual grounding and commitment to the men in their charge spread authority down the chain of command. The enlightened commitment of citizen officers like Slavenas is a strategic advantage that insures that democracy will always prevail.

Rod Carlson
White Plains, N.Y.

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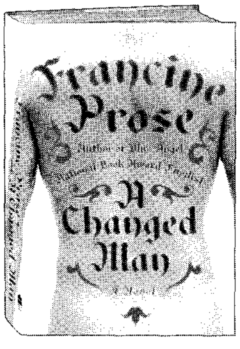

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*Los Angeles Times Book Review
†People Magazine

To receive notification of future events and publications by Francine Prose visit www.AuthorTracker.com

Other books by Francine Prose are available in paperback from Harper Perennial.

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THIS WEEK

EX-X

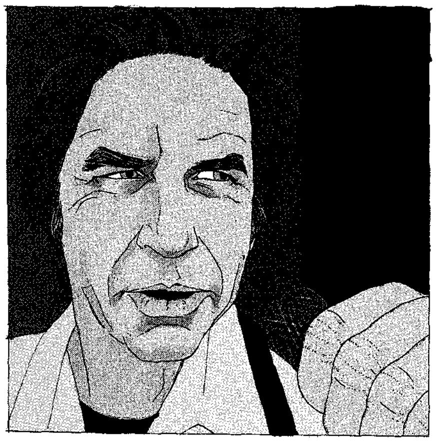
Like Clint Eastwood, John Doe is an unusually handsome American pop-culture figure with an unusually hardy career. Now fifty-one, Doe—who rose to fame as the front man for the Los Angeles punk band X—has released his strongest solo album to date, "Forever Hasn't Happened Yet," which features singing and writing from his sixteen-year-old daughter, Veronica Jane. The album is unadorned and direct, somewhere between early Neil Young and slightly dissolute folk. The songs play Doe's steely frontiersman reserve against his big tenor, which is forgiving even when his unlucky characters aren't. (Joe's Pub, March 31; see Night Life.)

ONSCREEN VIOLINS

In the spring of 1999, Lincoln Center's Great Performers series took a break from live performance to sponsor an extensive series of classical-music movies entitled "Great Pianists on Film," and its success has inspired similar events every year since. Its latest presentation is "Pulling Strings: Violinists on Film," which begins on Tuesday with Bruno Monsaingeon's "The Art of the Violin," a two-part panoply that mixes performances by the past century's great talents (including Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, and Fritz Kreisler) with commentary by such authorities as Itzhak Perlman. (Walter Reade Theatre, April 5; see Classical Music.)

IMAGE CONSCIOUS

The black-and-white mean streets of Frank Miller's 1991 graphic novel, "Sin City," come to digital life—streaked with color that is mostly blood red—in the movie of the same name, co-directed by Miller and Robert Rodriguez, who also produced, shot, and cut the film and wrote the music. The film's characters are hard men (and women) who test the limits of revenge; the ensemble cast includes Bruce Willis, Jessica Alba, Benicio Del Toro, and a very un-Frodo-like Elijah Wood. (Opens April 1; see Movies.)

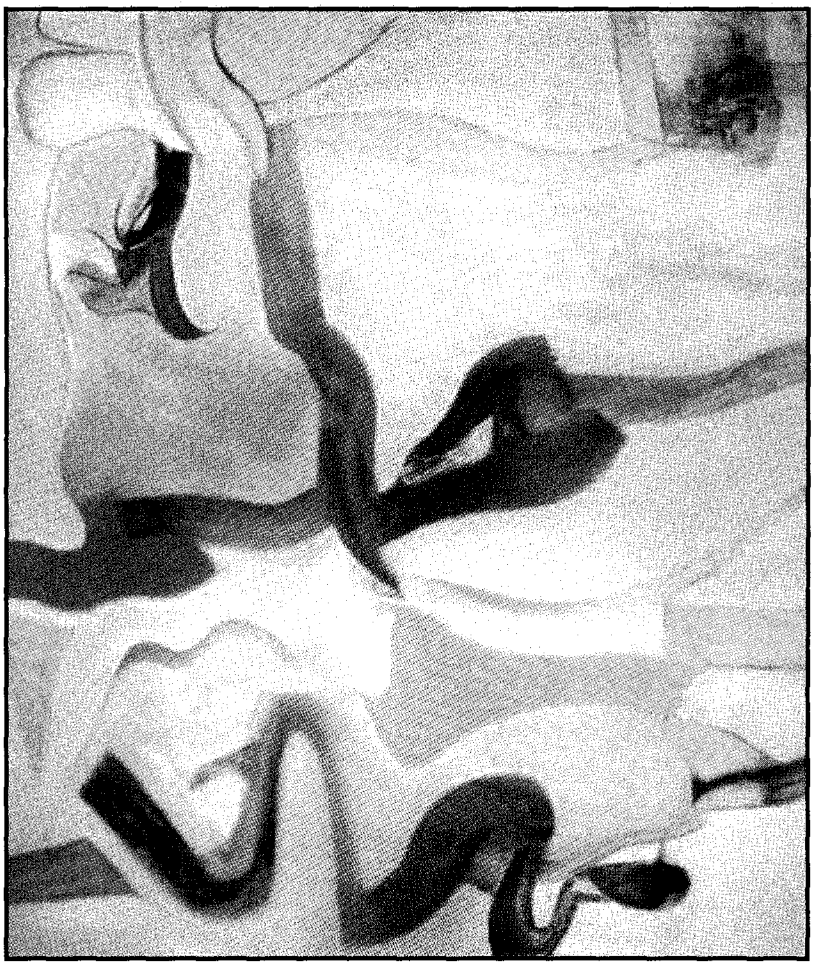


John Doe plays in support of his new album, "Forever Hasn't Happened Yet."

The twentieth century's great violinists, on film, at the Walter Reade Theatre.

LARA TOMLIN

Jessica Alba stars in the film version of the graphic-novel series "Sin City."



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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE AUDIENCE
This meta-musical by the Transport group, about the experience of theatregoing, was written by nineteen playwrights and puts fifty-odd actors onstage. Previews begin March 31. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

CALIGULA
The Classical Theatre of Harlem presents a new play about the notorious Roman dictator, written by the company's artistic director, Alfred Preisser, and Randy Weiner ("The Donkey Show"). André De Shields plays the title role. Previews begin April 1. (H.S.A. Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 212-868-4444.)

CHINA DOLL
A tribute to the Asian-American actress Anna May Wong (on the centenary of her birth) stars Rosanne Ma. Directed by Tisa Chang. Previews begin April 2. (West End Theatre, 263 W. 86th St. 212-279-4200.)

DOUBT
Cherry Jones stars in John Patrick Shanley's well-told tale about possible sexual abuse in a Catholic school. Doug Hughes directs. Two previews on March 30. Opens March 31 at 6:45. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

ENCORES! AT CITY CENTER
The season's second production is a revival of "Purlie!," the Tony- and Grammy-winning Broadway musical from 1970 based on Ossie Davis's "Purlie Victorious," about a preacher who inspires his congregation to fight racism. March 31-April 3. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE FALSE SERVANT
Martha Plimpton, Bill Buell, and Paul Lazar lead the cast in a Classic Stage Company production of the Marivaux play, in a new translation by Kathleen Tolan. Directed by Brian Kulick. Previews begin March 30. (136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200.)

GOD HATES THE IRISH: THE BALLAD OF ARMLESS JOHNNY
A farce by Sean Cunningham about the odyssey (away from Northern Ireland, then back) of a demoralized young man who has no father, no arms, and no prospects. With twelve original songs by Michael Friedman, of the Civilians. Will Frears directs. One preview on March 30. Opens March 31 at 8. (Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl., west of Seventh Ave. 212-868-4444.)

INDEX TO IDIOMS
In Deb Margolin's first new solo piece in four years, a mother turns her son's homework on English idioms into fuel for a lyric memoir. Directed by Merri Milwe. Previews begin March 31. Opens April 3 at 4. (The Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

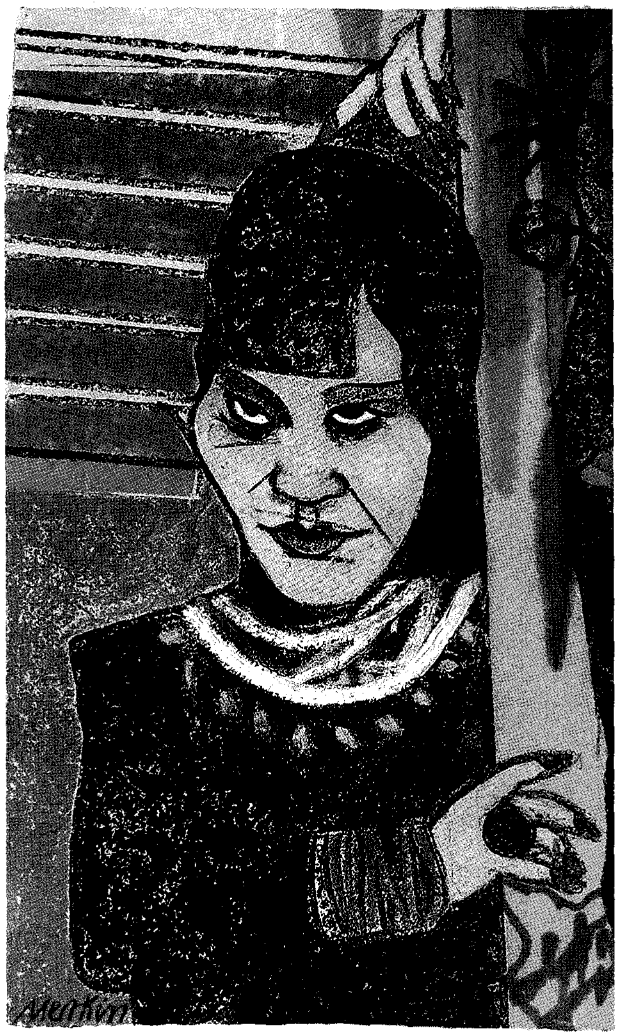
JULIUS CAESAR
Denzel Washington stars in a new production of Shakespeare's tragic play. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. In previews. Opens April 3 at 6:30. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

ON GOLDEN POND
James Earl Jones and Leslie Uggams star in a revival of Ernest Thompson's play about a family reunion at a cabin in Maine. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

PASSION
Patti LuPone, Audra McDonald, and Michael Cerveris star in Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's musical about romantic obsession, which concludes the seventh season of Lincoln Center's "American Songbook" series. March 30-April 1. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

THE PILLOWMAN
In a drama by the Irish playwright Martin McDonagh, an official interrogates an author who has written disturbing stories about children. With Jeff Goldblum and Billy Crudup. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

STEEL MAGNOLIAS
Delta Burke and Frances Sternhagen lead the cast in a revival of Robert Harling's play about the relationships between a close-knit group of women in the South. In previews. Opens April 4 at 6:30. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)


Rosanne Ma plays Anna May Wong in the Pan Asian Repertory's "China Doll."

RICHARD MERKIN

WHAT OF THE NIGHT
Jane Alexander stars in a new play drawn from the writings of Djuna Barnes, created by Alexander, Birgitta Trommler, and Noreen Tomassi. An MCC Theatre production. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALL SHOOK UP
The spirit of Elvis lives on in a musical comedy set to his songs. Christopher Ashley directs. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

ALTAR BOYZ
In this lampoon of the boy-band phenomenon, the lyricist-songwriters Gary Adler and Michael Patrick Walker hit below the belt without being vulgar in MTV-ready songs that are infectiously catchy. Five young studs—Matthew, Mark, Luke, Juan, and Abraham—make up the soul-cleansing, hip-thrusting (mostly) Christian pop group the Altar Boyz. The hunky Scott Porter (Matthew) looks like Justin Timberlake and radiates faux-pious smarm, while Tyler Maynard, a not-so-crypto gay band member, evokes Renée Zellweger with his all-out belting, hoofing, and grinning. Directed by Stafford Arima. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

DESSA ROSE
This new musical, like the Sherley Anne Williams novel on which it is based, is a treacly oversimplification of America's terrible history of slavery. Set in the antebellum South, it portrays the friendship between a runaway slave (LaChanze) and a sheltered young Charlestonian (the brilliant Rachel York) who overcome their initial mistrust of one another through their shared resentment of society's chief evil: white men. Despite the book's flaws, the cast is superb, and the talented director and choreographer Graciela Daniele shows them to fine effect. There's not a bad singer in the bunch, and there are a few great ones. Still, the over-all effect is a mishmash of Americana: "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman" meets "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS
A gleeful translation of the film to the musical stage, with a good-natured score by David Yazbek and a comic engine revved by Jeffrey Lane's perky book. (3/14/05) (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

FAUST IN LOVE
The second installment of Target Margin Theatre's three-part adaptation of Goethe's classic stars David Greenspan as Mephisto, Eunice Wong as Gretchen, and George Hannah as Faust. Adapted by Douglas Langworthy. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-358-3657.)

THE GLASS MENAGERIE
Jessica Lange and Christian Slater star in a revival of Tennessee Williams's drama, directed by David Leveaux. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

GOING TO ST. IVES
Lee Blessing's new drama about an African dictator and his conscience-stricken mother has its première at Primary Stages. Directed by Maria Mileaf. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HOT 'N' THROBBING
The final production of the Signature Theatre Company's Paula Vogel season is a drama about a woman who writes erotic screenplays to support her children. Directed by Les Waters. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

JACKIE MASON: FRESHLY SQUEEZED
The Borscht Belt comedian returns to Broadway with a new selection of his trademark wisecracks. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS
A new play by Ron Hutchinson, set in 1939, revisits the tensions that raged during the writing of the screenplay for "Gone with the Wind." (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ON SECOND AVENUE
This lighthearted, zesty revue celebrates the heyday of the Second Avenue Yiddish musical theatre through toe-tapping songs, rapid-fire jokes, and a dollop of history. Mike Burstyn—son of the performers Pesach and Lillian Lux—is a charismatic presence at the center of the show, which brings to life a generation of forgotten stars who brought razzle-dazzle to the Lower East Side. Created by Moishe Rosenfeld and Zalmen Mlotek. (J.C.C. in Manhattan, 334 Amsterdam Ave. 800-994-3347. Through April 10.)

SPAMALOT
In this musical, which has been "lovingly ripped off" (according to the marquee) from the movie "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," the director Mike Nichols and his deft assembly of Merry-

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Andrews have stage-managed an act of grace, calling down from the heaven of their imaginations a taste of youth's eternal spring. "Spamalot" is at its most sublime when it's most infantile; it is a gambol, and no mistake. The show is the brainchild of the former Python Eric Idle, who wrote the book and lyrics and shares musical credit with John Du Prez. Comic endeavor is not an easy one, and we should not receive it lightly. The vulgarity, the noise, the glorious, gossamer folderol are all a bold and fierce declaration of life. (3/28/05) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THIS IS HOW IT GOES
An interracial love triangle is the subject of a new play by Neil LaBute that stars Amanda Peet, Ben Stiller, and Jeffrey Wright. Directed by George C. Wolfe. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING)
James Urbaniak gives a bravura performance as the title character in this delicately scripted monologue by Will Eno, about a man troubled by thought or, rather, by the thoughts that become particularly troubling once you've suffered a breakup. Ably directed by Hal Brooks. (2/28/05) (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?
In 1962, when Edward Albee's early masterwork hit Broadway, American attitudes toward marriage still were conservative. It wasn't enough to have a nuclear family, a dog, and a white picket fence; you also had to project conventionality, whether you had it or not. Albee's play ripped the façades off of those tidy households, exposing the rages in the parlor and the angry ghosts in the attic. As George and Martha, a couple who wear their marital war wounds like badges of honor, Bill Irwin and Kathleen Turner give remarkable but uneven performances. They haven't found Albee's nuances yet, but they will, given a long run. The play itself, however, may age less well. Mores have changed, and, while George and Martha still disturb, they have lost their power to shock. They have become cultural signifiers instead of living characters: a Punch and Judy for the intellectual set. As Honey, the young wife of George's colleague Nick (David Harbour), the excellent Mireille Enos channels the late Sandy Dennis, who won an Oscar for her performance in the film role. The director, Anthony Page, has done well evoking the play's sixties setting, but that can't prevent the audience from treating the seriousness of Albee's message a bit too much like camp. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALSO PLAYING

AFTER ASHLEY
Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. (Closes April 3.)

AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

DEMOCRACY
Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.

GOOD VIBRATIONS
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

HOUSE/LIGHTS
St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Dumbo, Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.

JABU
Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. (Through April 2.)

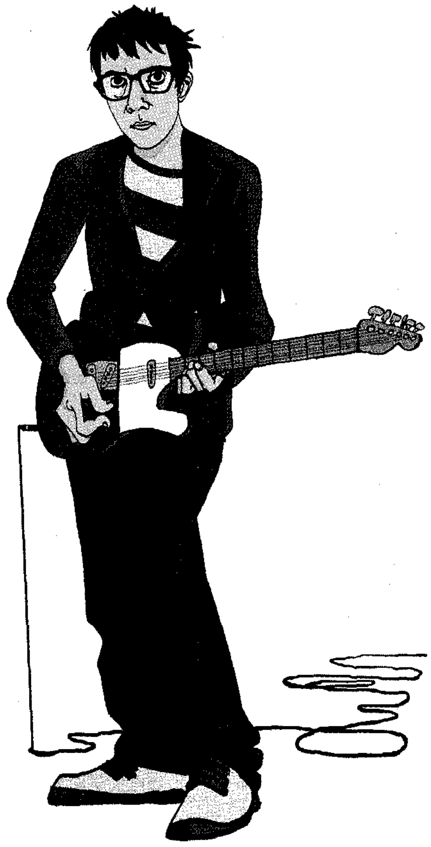
THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT
Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. (Closes April 3.)

LITTLE WOMEN
Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

NINE PARTS OF DESIRE
Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200.



Graham Coxon plays the Bowery Ballroom (see Night Life).

ORSON'S SHADOW
Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.

PLAY WITHOUT WORDS
BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. (Through April 3.)

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

ROMANCE
Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.

700 SUNDAYS
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

SHOCKHEADED PETER
Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

TWELVE ANGRY MEN
American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.

WICKED
Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

WOMAN BEFORE A GLASS
Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE

"THE CONTRACT (THE PIED PIPER)"
The National Ballet of Canada comes to BAM for the first time in more than forty years, presenting a mystic evening-length work by the company's artistic director, James Kudelka. Using a spare, direct dance vocabulary and a structure drawn from the old children's tale of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the piece relays the story of a charismatic faith healer who mesmerizes a community of afflicted children. With an original score by Michael Torke and a libretto by Robert Sirman. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. April 5 at 7:30. Through April 9.)

"IPHIGENIA"
The final week of Theodora Skipitares's restaging of the Euripides tragedy, in which five-foot Bunraku puppets are attached by taut strings to the actors' heads, shoulders, waists, and knees. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. March 31-April 3 at 7:30.)

PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE
The company, headed by the former American Ballet Theatre principal Terrence S. Orr, makes its New York début. Although the troupe was raised on Balanchine, Orr hired three seasoned choreographers to make contemporary dances for their season at the Joyce. Kevin O'Day pairs Sting with ballet steps, while Derek Deane creates a string of scenes in a fifties diner, set to Bruce Springsteen. And Dwight Rhoden uses Bach and Beethoven for "7th Heaven," in which he saturates the stage with bodies, then staggers the movements of their limbs to create unexpected, busy designs. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 29-April 1 at 8, April 2 at 2 and 8, and April 3 at 2.)

SAEKO ICHINOHE DANCE COMPANY
For thirty-five years, this New York troupe has been applying modern-dance methods to Japanese traditions. A retrospective anniversary program showcases the choreographer's sparse and slow-moving elegance, including her first U.S. solo, "Fire-Eating Bird" (1968), and the première of "Dreams Wandering Over a Withered Field," Jeff Moen's expressionist rendering of Basho poems. Ichinohe can be entirely Western, as in the Graham-like solo "Pearl" (1980), now nicely augmented with a trio, and even her Japanese works, such as "Tale of Genji," excerpted here, reconceive tradition. (Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College, E. 68th St. at Lexington Ave. 212-772-4448. March 31 at 7:30.)

BRIAN BROOKS MOVING COMPANY
Brooks likes to fuse minimalist rigor with flamboyant whimsy. At the start of his new piece at Symphony Space, dancers whack open a giant piñata, and it buries them in confetti. Wearing white ruffles and lacy bathing caps, they pop up from the shreds and swim through them, Esther Williams style. Gradually, they swap their swim gear for red, green, and black outfits, strewing the confetti as they move about. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. March 31-April 1 at 8:30 and April 2 at 11 A.M. and 8:30.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Two classical dance forms from South India share a weekend at Symphony Space. On Friday, kathakali dance-drama performers from Kerala present "Nala Charitam," a story from the Mahabharata; and on Saturday, the strikingly lovely bharata-natyam dancer Priyadarsini Govind (visiting from Chennai) takes the stage. Of the two forms, kathakali is at once more spectacular and more esoteric, portraying deities with elaborate makeup and an arcane language of hand gestures. Bharata natyam is just as stylized but more accessible. Govind is a master of facial expressions—petulant, enraged, coquettish—and her beauty is part of her art. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 1 and 2 at 8.)

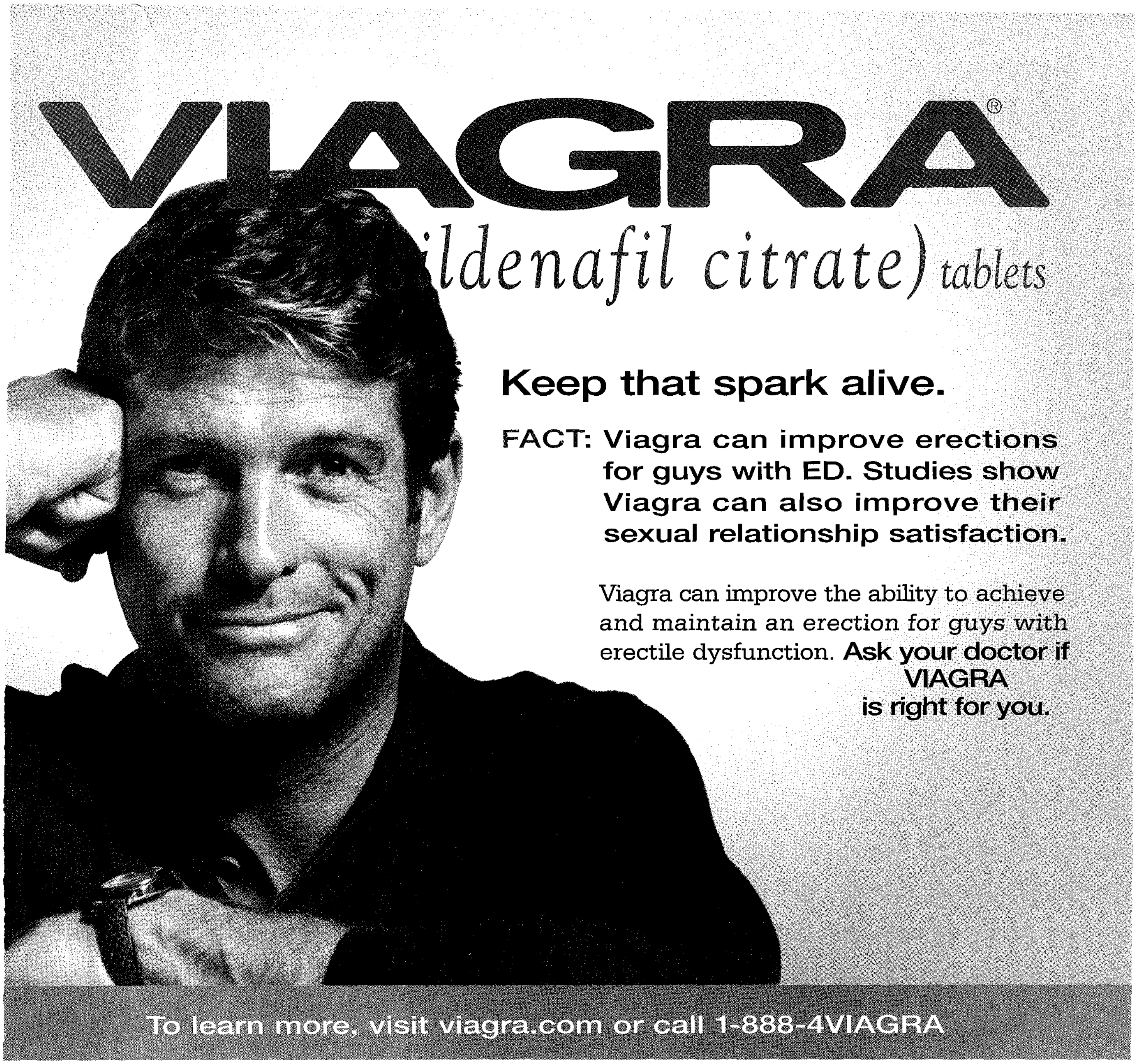
"SHLAMMER"
Dan Froot's neo-vaudevillian show—whose title is Yiddish slang for a Jewish hoodlum—probes the implications of slapstick violence through song, dance, and standup. Dressed in a constricting pin-striped suit that has a coat hanger sticking out of the jacket, Froot hits notes of Brechtian anxiety and absurdity. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0777. March 30-April 2 at 7:30.)

"STORAGE"
Five dancers perform solos, duets, and trios in a new work by Pam Tanowitz Dance, inspired by Charles Wuorinen's "Five," to which the piece is set. With video projections by Hillman Curtis. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. March 31-April 3 at 8.)

RICHMOND BALLET
In its Joyce début, the thirty-year-old troupe presents two programs stocked with dances by six contemporary choreographers. Colin Connor's "Streets and Legends" is a Scottish jig in toe shoes, while in William Soleau's "Nuevo Tango," performers dance with bar stools to the strains of Astor Piazzolla. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 5 at 8. Through April 10.)

BALLET INTERNATIONALE
The Indianapolis-based company, led by the former Kirov Ballet principal dancer Eldar Aliev, has its New York début at the Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, presenting "Carmen," choreographed by Alberto Alonso, and a selection of ballet classics by Petipa, Fokine, and others. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. April 3 at 2.)

JASHAR AWAN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VIAGRA is prescribed to treat erectile dysfunction. We know that no medicine is for everyone. If you use nitrate drugs, often used for chest pain (known as angina), don't take VIAGRA. Taking these drugs together could cause your blood pressure to drop to an unsafe level.

The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, facial flushing, and upset stomach. Less common are bluish or blurred vision, or being sensitive to light. These may occur for a brief time. Remember to protect yourself and your partner from sexually transmitted diseases.

Talk with your doctor first. Make sure you are healthy enough to have sex. If you have chest pain, nausea, or other discomforts during sex, seek medical help right away. Although erections lasting for more than four hours may occur rarely with all ED treatments in this drug class, it is important to seek immediate medical attention. Erections lasting longer than six hours can result in long-term loss of potency.

VIAGRA is covered under most Managed Care Plans.

Please see our patient summary of information for VIAGRA (25 mg, 50 mg, 100 mg) tablets on the following page.

Pfizer U.S. Pharmaceuticals

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PATIENT SUMMARY OF INFORMATION ABOUT **VIAGRA®**
(sildenafil citrate) tablets

This summary contains important information about VIAGRA®. It is not meant to take the place of your doctor's instructions. Read this information carefully before you start taking VIAGRA. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you do not understand any of this information or if you want to know more about VIAGRA.

This medicine can help many men when it is used as prescribed by their doctors. However, VIAGRA is not for everyone. It is intended for use only by men who have a condition called erectile dysfunction. **VIAGRA must never be used by men who are taking medicines that contain nitrates of any kind, at any time. This includes nitroglycerin. If you take VIAGRA with any nitrate medicine your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe or life threatening level.**

• What Is VIAGRA?
VIAGRA is a pill used to treat erectile dysfunction (impotence) in men. It can help many men who have erectile dysfunction get and keep an erection when they become sexually excited (stimulated).

You will not get an erection just by taking this medicine. VIAGRA helps a man with erectile dysfunction get an erection only when he is sexually excited.

• How Sex Affects the Body
When a man is sexually excited, the penis rapidly fills with more blood than usual. The penis then expands and hardens. This is called an erection. After the man is done having sex, this extra blood flows out of the penis back into the body. The erection goes away. If an erection lasts for a long time (more than 6 hours), it can permanently damage your penis. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have a prolonged erection that lasts more than 4 hours.

Some conditions and medicines interfere with this natural erection process. The penis cannot fill with enough blood. The man cannot have an erection. This is called erectile dysfunction if it becomes a frequent problem.

During sex, your heart works harder. Therefore sexual activity may not be advisable for people who have heart problems. Before you start any treatment for erectile dysfunction, ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of having sex. If you have chest pains, dizziness or nausea during sex, stop having sex and immediately tell your doctor you have had this problem.

• How VIAGRA Works
VIAGRA enables many men with erectile dysfunction to respond to sexual stimulation. When a man is sexually excited, VIAGRA helps the penis fill with enough blood to cause an erection. After sex is over, the erection goes away.

• VIAGRA Is Not for Everyone
As noted above (*How Sex Affects the Body*), ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough for sexual activity.

If you take any medicines that contain nitrates – either regularly or as needed – you should never take VIAGRA. If you take VIAGRA with any nitrate medicine or recreational drug containing nitrates, your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe level. You could get dizzy, faint, or even have a heart attack or stroke. Nitrates are found in many prescription medicines that are used to treat angina (chest pain due to heart disease) such as:

- nitroglycerin (sprays, ointments, skin patches or pastes, and tablets that are swallowed or dissolved in the mouth)
- isosorbide mononitrate and isosorbide dinitrate (tablets that are swallowed, chewed, or dissolved in the mouth)

Nitrates are also found in recreational drugs such as amyl nitrate or nitrite ("poppers"). If you are not sure if any of your medicines contain nitrates, or if you do not understand what nitrates are, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

VIAGRA is only for patients with erectile dysfunction. VIAGRA is not for newborns, children, or women. Do not let anyone else take your VIAGRA. VIAGRA must be used only under a doctor's supervision.

• What VIAGRA Does Not Do
- VIAGRA does not cure erectile dysfunction. It is a treatment for erectile dysfunction.
- VIAGRA does not protect you or your partner from getting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV — the virus that causes AIDS.
- VIAGRA is not a hormone or an aphrodisiac.

• What To Tell Your Doctor Before You Begin VIAGRA
Only your doctor can decide if VIAGRA is right for you. VIAGRA can cause mild, temporary lowering of your blood pressure. You will need to have a thorough medical exam to diagnose your erectile dysfunction and to find out if you can safely take VIAGRA alone or with your other medicines. Your doctor should determine if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of having sex.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you:
- have ever had any heart problems (e.g., angina, chest pain, heart failure, irregular heart beats, heart attack or narrowing of the aortic valve)
- have ever had a stroke
- have low or high blood pressure
- have a rare inherited eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa
- have ever had any kidney problems
- have ever had any liver problems
- have ever had any blood problems, including sickle cell anemia or leukemia
- are allergic to sildenafil or any of the other ingredients of VIAGRA tablets
- have a deformed penis, Peyronie's disease, or ever had an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- have stomach ulcers or any types of bleeding problems
- are taking any other medicines

• VIAGRA and Other Medicines
Some medicines can change the way VIAGRA works. Tell your doctor about **any medicines** you are taking. Do not start or stop taking any medicines before checking with your doctor or pharmacist. This includes prescription and nonprescription medicines or remedies:
- Remember, VIAGRA should never be used with medicines that contain nitrates (see *VIAGRA Is Not for Everyone*).
- If you are taking alpha-blocker therapy for the treatment of high blood pressure or prostate problems, you should not take a dose of greater than 25 mg of VIAGRA at the same time (within 4 hours) as you take your dose of alpha-blocker.
- If you are taking a protease inhibitor, your dose may be adjusted (please see *Finding the Right Dose for You*).
- VIAGRA should not be used with any other medical treatments that cause erections. These treatments include pills, medicines that are injected or inserted into the penis, implants or vacuum pumps.

• Finding the Right Dose for You
VIAGRA comes in different doses (25 mg, 50 mg and 100 mg). If you do not get the results you expect, talk with your doctor. You and your doctor can determine the dose that works best for you.
- Do not take more VIAGRA than your doctor prescribes.
- If you think you need a larger dose of VIAGRA, check with your doctor.
- VIAGRA should not be taken more than once a day.

If you are older than age 65, or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg) of VIAGRA. If you are taking protease inhibitors, such as for the treatment of HIV, your doctor may recommend a 25 mg dose and may limit you to a maximum single dose of 25 mg of VIAGRA in a 48 hour period. If you are taking alpha-blocker therapy, you should not take a dose of greater than 25 mg of VIAGRA at the same time (within 4 hours) as your dose of alpha-blocker.

• How To Take VIAGRA
Take VIAGRA about one hour before you plan to have sex. Beginning in about 30 minutes and for up to 4 hours, VIAGRA can help you get an erection if you are sexually excited. If you take VIAGRA after a high-fat meal (such as a cheeseburger and french fries), the medicine may take a little longer to start working. VIAGRA can help you get an erection when you are sexually excited. You will not get an erection just by taking the pill.

• Possible Side Effects
Like all medicines, VIAGRA can cause some side effects. These effects are usually mild to moderate and usually don't last longer than a few hours. Some of these side effects are more likely to occur with higher doses. The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, flushing of the face, and upset stomach. Less common side effects that may occur are temporary changes in color vision (such as trouble telling the difference between blue and green objects or having a blue color tinge to them), eyes being more sensitive to light, or blurred vision.

In rare instances, men have reported an erection that lasts many hours. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. If not treated right away, permanent damage to your penis could occur (see *How Sex Affects the Body*).

Heart attack, stroke, irregular heart beats, and death have been reported rarely in men taking VIAGRA. Most, but not all, of these men had heart problems before taking this medicine. It is not possible to determine whether these events were directly related to VIAGRA.

VIAGRA may cause other side effects besides those listed on this sheet. If you want more information or develop any side effects or symptoms you are concerned about, call your doctor.

• Accidental Overdose
In case of accidental overdose, call your doctor right away.

• Storing VIAGRA
Keep VIAGRA out of the reach of children. Keep VIAGRA in its original container. Store at 25°C (77°F); excursions permitted to 15-30°C (59-86°F) [see USP Controlled Room Temperature].

• For More Information on VIAGRA
VIAGRA is a prescription medicine used to treat erectile dysfunction. Only your doctor can decide if it is right for you. This sheet is only a summary. If you have any questions or want more information about VIAGRA, talk with your doctor or pharmacist, visit www.viagra.com, or call 1-888-4VIAGRA.

Pfizer

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September 2002

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

TZADIK MUSIC FESTIVAL
The tenth-anniversary celebration of John Zorn's composer-friendly label concludes with shows by Charming Hostess and Pharaoh's Daughter. The Bay Area vocal trio Charming Hostess has a sublime new record, "Sarajevo Blues," that's a joint effort between the bandleader Jewlia Eisenberg and the Sarajevan exile poet Semezdin Mehmedinovic. It fuses Mehmedinovic's funny and bitter verse ("Death Is a Job" concerns war photographers) and Eisenberg's intricate, pan-ethnic vocal harmonies, which career from Sufi to Motown to Sephardic. Pharaoh's Daughter, led by the oudist and vocalist Basya Schechter, has its own new record, the instrumental release "Queen's Dominion." The trance-inducing songs, loosely inspired by travels to countries such as Kurdistan and Mali, are full of odd time signatures and tapestry-like melodies from Schechter's oud and the Persian santir (a hammered dulcimer), played masterfully by Alan Kushan. (Edmond J. Safra Hall, Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Pl. 646-437-4202. March 30 at 7.)

THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA
After performing in relative obscurity for nearly six decades, the legendary traditional-gospel ensemble is enjoying something of a rebirth. They recently performed at the Grammy Awards with fellow-winner and hip-hop darling Kanye West, and they've just released "Atom Bomb," a collection of soul-stirring religious hymns and gut-wrenching interpretations of soul classics. The blues-harp master Charlie Musselwhite, who appears on their latest release, lends a hand. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-307-7171. March 31 at 8.)

PAT METHENY GROUP
On his recently released album, "The Way Up," Metheny delivers a sixty-eight-minute opus that takes full advantage of his revamped, eclectic ensemble, which now includes the Mexican drummer Antonio Sanchez, the Vietnamese trumpeter Coung Vu, and the Swiss-born harmonica player Grégoire Maret. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171. April 1-2 at 8.)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
The brainy singers Kurt Elling and Luciana Souza both have a taste for mating poetry to jazz rhythms; Elling has cited Rilke and Rexroth, while Souza prefers Elizabeth Bishop and Pablo Neruda. The good news is that neither leaves swing out of the mix. (Allen Room, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. March 31-April 2 at 7:30.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—April 1: The **Wiyos**, a Brooklyn-based trio named after one of New York City's toughest old-time street gangs, draw on rural blues, ragtime, spirituals, and Appalachian jug-band music of the nineteen-twenties and thirties. The group brings exuberance and intensity to these vintage styles, and its performances are layered with vaudevillian stage antics reminiscent of such mavericks as Uncle Dave Macon. Tuesdays: **Slavic Soul Party,** a neo-Balkan brass band fronted by the vibraphonist Matt Moran, plays traditional Slavic fare while fearlessly following their instincts into free-form jazz and funk grooves.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 31: Roots rock with a dash of New Orleans from **Cowboy Mouth.** April 3: The German thrash-metal outfit **Kreator & Vader.** April 4: The Frank Zappa tribute band **Project Object** gets a boost from the Zappa-band vets Ike Willis and Napoleon Murphy Brock.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 30: The young piano player and singer **Regina Spektor** was

TABLES FOR TWO

V STEAKHOUSE

10 Columbus Circle (212-823-9500)—Jean-Georges Vongerichten's latest establishment might just be Manhattan's first embarrassing piece of Vegas backwash, complete with a Cirque du Soleil-style soundtrack, red velvet upholstered chairs, and gilded fake trees. The diners are expensively dressed, in an out-of-town way: one evening a woman in furry après-ski boots climbed into the lap of her date for an after-dinner make-out session, and the same night, during Christo's spectacle in Central Park, a family dined in matching orange tops. (Although the restaurant claims to provide a view of the Park, most tables actually look into a physical therapist's office across Sixtieth Street.)

Vongerichten's idea of updating the classic American steak house is to simply ignore its conventions—including the quaint notion that the steak should be especially good. Recently, a rare order came out medium, while a medium rare came out medium gray. You won't even want to send it back, since by this point in the meal you'll already be looking forward to leaving. The single-serving, sixty-six-dollar porterhouse, nearly twenty dollars more expensive than the priciest steaks at the best steak houses in town, is depressing. There's no crunch to the exterior, no juice to the interior, and no flavor at all. The Niman Ranch New York Strip steak is even odder, with the smooth texture of tofu. Other cuts of meat, such as the filet mignon and the veal-rib chop, are less offensive, but they still lack character. Among the many accompaniments offered—Vongerichten has maintained the traditional side-order shakedown—are something called Fripps, a bland tempura-battered slice of potato that the servers push with suspicious enthusiasm.

There's little consolation in other areas of the menu. An egg-roll-like pork appetizer arrived lumped in the bottom of an empty rocks glass. The exorbitantly priced shellfish plate recently featured desiccated oysters and lacklustre crab claws. And the gimmicky deconstructed lemon-meringue pie required more effort to eat than it was worth. If nothing else, diners will have the pleasure of knowing that their next meal, however humble or exalted, will taste terrific and seem like a bargain. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $19-$88.)

—*Owen Phillips*

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born in Moscow, but she made her name in New York City's anti-folk scene. She has a pungent and engaging take on the singer-songwriter genre. March 31: The **North Mississippi Allstars** have spent the past decade cultivating a rambling, heartfelt mix of hill-country blues and roots rock. The Mississippi-raised brothers Luther and Cody Dickinson (sons of the legendary Memphis producer Jim Dickinson) and the bassist Chris Chew stay loyal to their region's music, but they aren't afraid to explore psychedelic pop and indulge in a jam-band sensibility. April 1: In 2002, the bespectacled guitar player **Graham Coxon** left the massively successful British band Blur in order to pursue the more experimental fringes of lo-fi indie rock. Coxon now embraces, on his own terms, the pop sound he once shunned. His latest album is "Happiness in Magazines." April 2: The flagship group on the über-hip DFA label roster, **LCD Soundsystem** is the pet project of that label's impresario, James Murphy. Its quirky electronic music is rife with knowing references to indie-rock esoterica.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—April 1: The young blue-eyed-soul singer **Marc Broussard**, who was born and raised in Louisiana, has a voice as rich as the smokiest roux. April 2: The groovy Venezuelan dance band **Los Amigos Invisibles.** April 5: **Dogs Die in Hot Cars** has to be one of the worst-named bands in recent memory. But don't judge this band by its moniker. The Scottish outfit's contemporary take on the sparkly pop of the New Wave era calls to mind the best of XTC, Wall of Voodoo, and Dexy's Midnight Runners. ♦ The New York Swing Dance Society gathers here the first Sunday of every month, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 212-696-9737.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 31: **John Doe** (see This Week). April 1: Mark Stewart and Rob Schwimmer are a pair of serious sidemen who follow their musical ids when they perform as **Polygraph Lounge.** Using everything from toy instruments to theremins, they invoke the spirit of the twentieth-century comedic bandleader Spike Jones.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—March 31: A dozen years ago, the hip-hop artist **Lyrics Born** (then known as Asia Born) burst onto the scene with politically charged, deeply introspective raps delivered in a fast-paced singsong style. The Tokyo-born, Berkeley-raised rapper's new album, "Same !@#$ Different Day," which includes collaborations with such artists as KRS-One, Lateef, and DJ Shadow, adds freewheeling, harmonious raps to his trademark vocal style. With MC Felix and his Minnesota-based hip-hop group, Heiruspecs. April 1: The noise outfit **Wolf Eyes** occupies a cacophonous no man's land between frenzied hardcore and electronic dissonance.

S.O.B.'S

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—March 31: The Brazilian percussionist Cyro Baptista stirs up a storm with his spellbinding ensemble **Beat the Donkey.**

SPIRIT NEW YORK

530 W. 27th St. (212-268-9477)—April 1: The Mexican singer **Julieta Venegas** grew up listening to American rock and roll by way of Southern California radio stations; her infectious, angular compositions recall introspective singer-songwriters such as Suzanne Vega and spikier artists such as Fiona Apple and Björk. Her latest album, "Si," is an upbeat collaboration with the Argentinean songwriter and producer Coti Sorokin.

SUPPER CLUB

240 W. 47th St. (212-921-1940)—April 5: The **Psychedelic Furs.** Though largely relegated to the eighties nostalgia circuit, the graying onetime MTV darlings continue to write new material and tour.

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—April 2: **Ray Lamontagne** was four years out of high school and working at a shoe factory in Maine when he heard a song on the radio one morning that changed his life: "Tree Top Flyer," by Stephen Stills. He quit his job, sold his van, bought a guitar, and immersed himself in the likes of Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Ray Charles, and Otis Redding. Their influences, plus a strong debt to Van Morrison, mark his début.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BARBÈS

376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—April 1: When **Anthony Coleman's** not delving into Jewish music or avant-garde jazz, the pianist can be found parsing the durable legacy of the New Orleans patriarch Jelly Roll Morton. April 3: Coleman's occasional musical partner, the saxophonist **Roy Nathanson,** brings in his own quartet. This former Lounge Lizard values humor as much as farsighted improvisation. Sundays: The French guitarist **Stephane Wrembel** channels the hot jazz of Django Reinhardt. Tuesdays: The violinist **Jenny Scheinman.** You've heard her violin on Norah Jones's hit record "Come Away with Me," but this ambitious composer and performer samples a larger variety of the world's music when she's on her own.

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 30-April 2: You might find time suspended when listening to the veteran vocalist **Andy Bey,** both for his mesmerizing interpretations and for his glacially slow delivery.

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THIS WEEK'S WEB EXCLUSIVE:

John Cassidy talks about Michael Bloomberg's bid for a second term, and New York's bid for the Olympics.

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DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—March 29-April 3: Two seasoned pros, the singer **Ernestine Anderson** and the saxophonist and flutist **Frank Wess** and his quartet, pay tribute to Billie Holiday; her ninetieth birthday would have been on April 7.

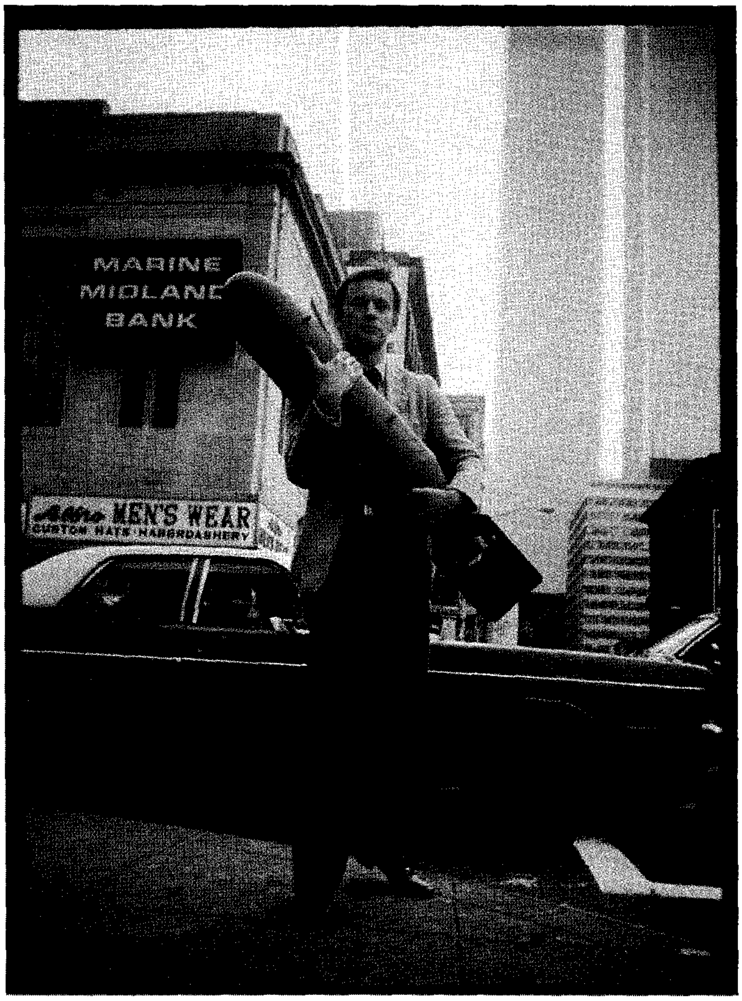
IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—March 30-April 3: The trombonist **Roswell Rudd** has been paying homage to Thelonious Monk since at least the early sixties, when he and the late Steve Lacy led a band devoted to the pianist's quirky and imperishable compositions. The younger devotees **Don Byron,** on clarinet, and **Dave Douglas,** on trumpet, will have their own musical reflections to add. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Through April 3: The bluesy forms of Jimi Hendrix's signature tunes give the **World Saxophone Quartet** plenty to work with, as they proved on last year's surprisingly effective album "Experience."

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—March 30-31: **Rashied Ali,** John Coltrane's last drummer, and **Sonny Fortune,** a rugged saxophonist who's worked with Elvin Jones (the man Ali replaced), investigate common ground.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—April 3: The **Willem Breuker Kollektief,** spectacularly skilled Dutchmen who mate classical precision to free-jazz ideas and spice it all with Marx Brothers antics, are irreverent, virtuosic, and downright funny.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through April 3: **Kurt Rosenwinkel's** latest album, "Deep Song," provides further evidence that this skillful guitarist can bring flair to crafty originals as well as the well-chosen standard. The saxophonist Mark Turner, a longtime collaborator, enlivens his quartet. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.



Martin Kippenberger's self-portraits are at Luhring Augustine.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—**"Diane Arbus: Revelations,"** an indeed revealing (though gratingly worshipful) retrospective, confirms Arbus's achievement as a revolutionary photographer. She turned picturemaking inside out. She didn't gaze at her subjects; she induced them to gaze at her. Selected for their strangeness and confidence, they burst through the camera lens with a presence so intense that whatever attitude she or you or anyone might take toward them disintegrates. The show's overstuffed component of biographical material is peculiarly inapt, given that Arbus is important not for what she was but for her regular feat of vanishing, as a personality, when her camera clicked. Through May 30. ♦ **"Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640): The Drawings."** Through April 3. ♦ Duccio's "Madonna and Child," circa 1300, a triumphant recent acquisition for the Met. Through May 15. ♦ **"From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master."** Scholars have been slowly unearthing the oeuvre of Fra Carnevale, an artist little known aside from his mention in Vasari's "Lives of the Artists," over the course of the past century; this exhibition presents what is now known of the lost master's paintings, alongside samples of his contemporaries' work. Through May 1. ♦ **"Klee: His Years at the Bauhaus (1921-1931),"** a show of thirty small works, the latest installment of the Met's ongoing chronological survey of the German artist's oeuvre. Through April 3. ♦ **"The Kano School: Orthodoxy and Iconoclasm."** Through June 5. ♦ **"Heritage of Power: Ancient Sculpture from West Mexico, the Andrall E. Pearson Family Collection."** Through April 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Thomas Demand."** The German artist's crisp photographs of cut-and-glued, life-size mockups of unpeopled environments suggest that, like photographs, our assumptions about reality are paper thin. Through May 30. ♦ **"Contemporary Voices: Works from the UBS Art Collection."** Through April 25. ♦ **"Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape"** surveys contemporary landscape design with elaborate architectural models, virtual tours, video, and photographs. Through May 16. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Eye of the Storm: Works in Situ by Daniel Buren."** Through June 8. ♦ **"The Hugo Boss Prize 2004: Rirkrit Tiravanija."** Through May 11. ♦ An infinite regression in the mirror of MTV, Slater Bradley's **"Doppelganger Trilogy"** ostensibly presents three degraded videos of rock stars. Kurt Cobain's blond mop-top and cardigan sweater identify him in a distorted film apparently bootlegged by an audience member with a concealed camcorder in the audience; Joy Division's Ian Curtis seems to be disappearing into the snow of aging film stock; a moonwalking Michael Jackson keeps getting whited out by glitches in faux-vintage footage. It's a tissue of simulations, with Bradley's collaborator, Benjamin Brock, impersonating—very convincingly—all three fallen pop gods. Through May 22. ♦ **"School of Paris."** Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism—Paris in the teens and twenties of the last century was a hotbed of painterly experiment. An Eiffel Tower here, a train embankment or mournful demimondaine there, and Picasso, Modigliani, Delaunay, Gleizes, Severini, Malevich, and Léger devise a world. Through May 3. ♦ Two other surveys of twentieth-century innovation drawn from the museum's permanent collection, **"Expressionism"** and **"Paul Klee,"** are up through May 11. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

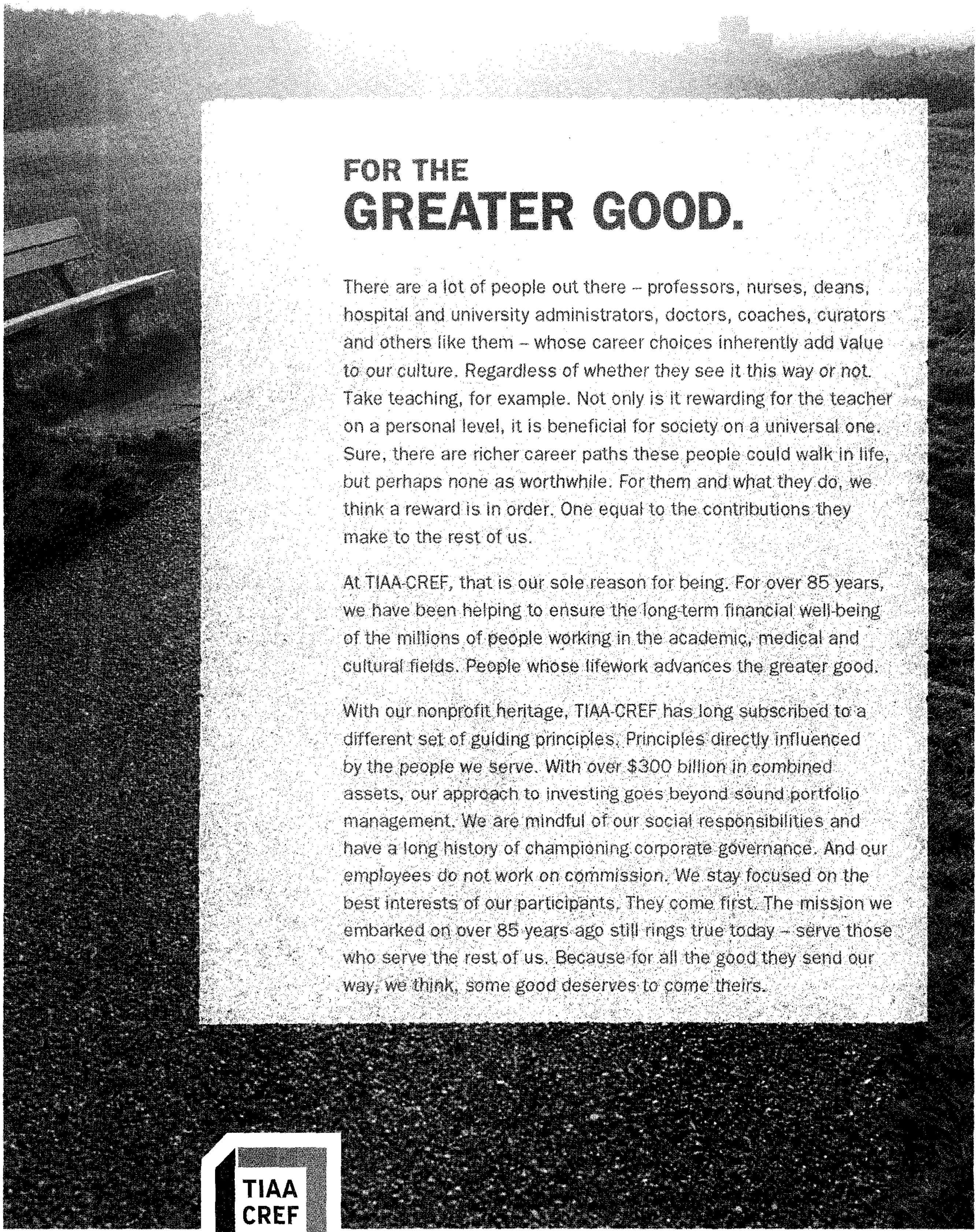
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper."** Through May 8. ♦ **"Tim Hawkinson,"** a mid-career retrospective of the California artist's diverse inventions, including the football-field-size "Überorgan," an automated bagpipe housed in the sculpture garden at 590 Madison Avenue, at Fifty-seventh Street. Through May 29. ♦ **"Ellen Gallagher: DeLuxe,"** a series of embellished images based on advertisements from midcentury African-American magazines. Through May 15. ♦ **"Set Up: Recent Acquisitions in Photography."** Through June 26. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Basquiat,"** a retrospective of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Through June 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-368-5900)—Each year, a committee of noted artists presides over the Academy's Invitational Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture, after which the chosen works are donated to museum collections. This year's crop includes some standouts: a graceful, elephantine installation of pastel-painted scrap wood by Phoebe Washburn; a soaring room-sized construction of geometric panels, strings, and wall paintings by Phong Bui; and a pair of wall paintings—one is actually made of plasticine, the other of acrylic on styrene panels—by James Esber. The opportunity to visit the Academy's serenely empty neoclassic campus is a bonus. Through April 10. (Open Thursdays through Sundays, 1 to 4.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India."** See the Queens Museum of Art. Through June 5. ♦ **Michael Joo's "Bodhi Obfuscatus (Space-Baby)."** Through May 1. ♦ **"Imperial Elegance: Chinese Ceramics from the Asia Society's Rockefeller Collection."** Through May 1. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY
Grand Army Plaza (718-230-2100)—**"Brooklyn Landscapes: Paintings by Catharine Balco and Albert Fayngold."** Through May 15. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 9; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 6; and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

**FOR THE**
GREATER GOOD.

There are a lot of people out there – professors, nurses, deans, hospital and university administrators, doctors, coaches, curators and others like them – whose career choices inherently add value to our culture. Regardless of whether they see it this way or not. Take teaching, for example. Not only is it rewarding for the teacher on a personal level, it is beneficial for society on a universal one. Sure, there are richer career paths these people could walk in life, but perhaps none as worthwhile. For them and what they do, we think a reward is in order. One equal to the contributions they make to the rest of us.

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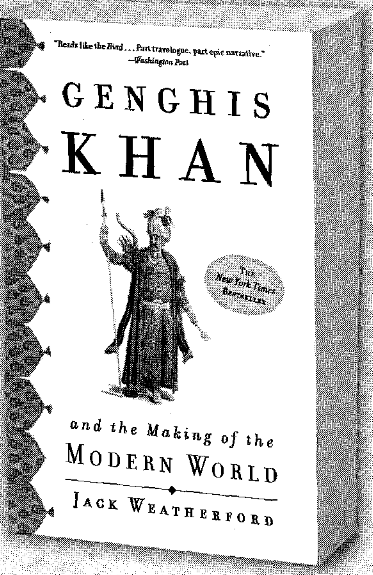
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"It's hard to think of anyone else who rose from such inauspicious beginnings to something so awesome, except maybe Jesus." So writes *Harper's* in its glowing review of Jack Weatherford's radical new look at Genghis Khan, in which he argues that Khan was in fact one of history's most progressive leaders.

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FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (212-217-5800)—Seventy years of red-carpet-worthy gowns are on display in the F.I.T. gallery for **"Glamour: Fashion, Film, Fantasy."** Erudite wall texts parse the definition of glamour, but it's hard to be a good student when there are so many fabulous dresses to admire. Adrian's white silk-satin evening dress, worn by Jean Harlow in "Bombshell" (1933), faces off against an Edith Head polychrome paisley number modelled by Marlene Dietrich in "A Foreign Affair" (1948). Other standouts include the Scaasi black mesh-and-sequin ensemble worn by Barbra Streisand to accept her Oscar for "Funny Girl," in 1969, and recent gowns by Zac Posen, As Four, and Trash Couture. Through April 16. ♦ **"Rico Puhlmann: A Fashion Legacy, 1955-1996."** Illustrations, photographs, and other material by the fashionista né Richard Georg Willi Puhlmann, whose career was cut short nine years ago by the crash of T.W.A. Flight 800. Through April 9. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8, and Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—Five years ago, the omnibus "Greater New York" filled P.S. 1 from boiler room to rafters with an exhilaratingly fresh cross-section of new work by artists with studios in and around Gotham. Many of those included have gone on to establish enviable careers, and the stakes are high for **"Greater New York 2005,"** a survey of current art life involving six curators and more than a hundred and sixty artists. The good news is that smart, skillful innovation and stubborn insistence on personal vision outrun the inevitable hype. There is forgettable stuff, of course, but every room holds something thought-provoking and new—unlike most comparable tastemaker surveys, this one deserves the "must-see" moniker. Through Sept. 26. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—Politics, economics, history, and religion—as well as desire—mingle in **"Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India,"** a dual-venue show that attempts to take the pulse of the world's largest democracy. The Asia Society's smaller space houses paintings like those in Archana Hande's handmade books, along with Dayanita Singh's black-and-white photos of deceased leaders' possessions (Gandhi's shoes, Nehru's jackets). The show stretches out in Queens to include Nalini Malani's eerie projections through clear cylinders, Sharmila Samant's Coke-bottle-cap ode to consumerism, and L. N. Tallur's inflatable shrine. With a few exceptions, the high-tech acumen of Bollywood and Bangalore seems not to have affected the traditional bias of much of the work. Through June 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ERIC FISCHL
Fischl holds steady in this series of paintings, working with interiors and from photographs as he did in his last exhibition at Boone, in 2003, and stepping back a bit from the preppy nightmares for which he became known. An anonymously modern cast of characters—white, professional, and often nude—enact soundless bedroom dramas in which any violence is psychological, gathering like storm clouds on a horizon. The best and most disturbing of these chiaroscuro vignettes is a painting of a woman stuck under the suffocating embrace of a man. One's mind jumps to other figurative-painting stalwarts like Lucian Freud, but even his recent output, with its splotchy aristocratic portraits and paintings of hard-boiled eggs seems utterly weird—or Fischlesque—by comparison. Through April 23. (Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929.)

ROBERT GOBER
Sprawling, emotional, and rather self-indulgent, Gober's new show centers on the crowd-pleasing tropes of sex and death: reproductions of *Times* pages dated September 12, 2001, are hung opposite the same images printed in mirror reversal; both sets are overdrawn with crayon images of anonymous bodies embracing. On the floor between these elegies are two rows of low concrete plinths supporting wax and glass replicas of mundane perishables—a bowl of fruit, a crate of disposable diapers. A headless crucifix with streams of water pouring from the nipples presides over all the twinned objects, an intentionally kitschy touch that has the effect of unintentional bombast. Through April 23. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

MARTIN KIPPENBERGER
It's a virtual Kippenbergerfest in New York's galleries right now, but this show offers the best vantage for considering an artist who, like Warhol, made his persona central to his work. By turns self-deprecating, grandiose, and absurd, these self-portraits reveal the zany virtuosity of the artist, who died in 1997, at the age of forty-four. A standing sculpture cast in clear polyurethane littered with cigarette butts; the paunchy artist-as-clown holding balloons; a painting of the artist with his head bandaged à la van Gogh: this orgy of narcissism reiterates Kippenberger's position as one of the most inventive artists of his generation. Through April 30. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

Short List

DAMIEN HIRST
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.
Through April 23.

JONAS MEKAS
Stendhal, 545 W. 20th St. 212-366-1549.
Through April 31.

TABAIMO
James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.
Through April 2.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JEFF DAVIS
Davis's small, scattered figure studies at first suggest pages from an Old Master's sketchbook, despite their distinctly un-classical poses—they urinate in choreographed arcs, brandish severed heads on pikes, or are broken into parts and stacked as in a Dali painting. Drawings in colored pencil and ink are sharply defined, while his watercolors disintegrate into ghostlike immateriality. A new element in this show is an ingenious set of multicolored wax heads, made from casting rubber Halloween masks. The effect of these grimacing figures is uncannily like his drawings, even though they're essentially readymade. Through April 16. (KS Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918.)

ELLSWORTH KELLY
A tightly edited historical show of small paintings dating from 1955 to 1963. Through April 23. (Peter Freeman, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-5154.)

PHILIP PAVIA
Pavia's double-life-size painted terra-cotta heads look like ancient statuary left outdoors and worn down by the elements. Death masks and Roman busts come to mind, as well as Near Eastern figurines and fragments of Greek statuary; arranged in a circle, staring inward at the viewer, they're like a silent lost tribe. Pavia, a figure long associated with the original New York School of Abstract Expressionists, sees them as interior reflections rather than portraits—"the inside of the skull, not the outside." The gestural marks of their making are everywhere, from the smoothed ridges of a brow to the rough dabs of clay on the backs of their heads. Through April 9. (OK Harris, 383 West Broadway. 212-431-3600.)

HARRIET SHORR
Bright, chintz-like paintings of lords and ladies at play, their picturesque activities turned upside down, in some cases literally. The show's inspiration is Watteau's "Embarkation to Cythera," but the romantic scene (and scenes like it) is insistently upended, dismembered, and shattered. Through April 2. (Pelavin, 13 Jay St., at Hudson St. 212-925-9424.)

"NEW YORK IN THE 70S"
Photographs by Allan Tannenbaum, along with Village People artifacts, fashion items, film, and ephemera. Through July 10. (Tribute, 24 Broadway, at Bowling Green. 212-952-1000.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

LARRY CLARK
This retrospective covers a lot of ground, much of it more than once. Beginning with his first book, "Tulsa," published in 1971—in which he chronicled intimately, in black-and-white, the lives of his home-town friends—Clark has focussed on kids: adolescents shooting up, fondling guns, and looking ready for a car wreck. In "Teenage Lust," from 1983, Clark spliced his autobiography (using family photos, text, newspaper clippings, and court records) with images of teen-agers hot to trot. An updated version of the material appeared in the 1995 movie "Kids," represented here by big color stills of skateboarders in Washington Square Park. A group of collages show Clark making the transition from still photography to movies, packing motion into a frame. And then there's the photocopy of an itemized list of drugs Clark had taken by the time he entered rehab. It begins with alcohol, of which he consumed "as much as I could every day for 10 years," and racks up twenty-seven other substances, including an experiment with spray paint in 1968. Through June 5. (International Center of Photography, 1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 212-857-0000.)

ADRIANA GROISMAN
Women with bare shoulders and sleek hair and men with closed eyes and impassioned faces populate these black-and-white prints of tango clubs in Buenos Aires. Groisman, who has been exploring the subculture for more than fifteen years, builds a steamy atmosphere with isolated details (a hand, a glass, a cigarette) and longer views that lock them into context. She takes you up the well-worn stairs in high-heeled shoes, into the rest rooms for makeup and wardrobe adjustments, and onto the dance floor, where there might be a lone couple in a clinch or a swirl of couples, seen from behind the blades of an electric fan. Through April 2. (Leica, 670 Broadway. 212-777-3051.)

ANETA GRZESZYKOWSKA AND JAN SMAGA
For devotees of online real-estate listings with schematic floor plans and three-hundred-and-sixty-degree virtual tours, this show will be pure manna. The two young Polish artists take hundreds of pictures of lived-in apartments, all from above, then seamlessly reconfigure the shots into an aerial map of the subjects' lives. In the finished pieces, we see what's on the stove, who's in the bathtub, and who doesn't put away the dishes. Is it only a lack of space that compels someone to place a grand piano at the foot of the bed, or does it belong to a manic composer prone to bouts of sleeplessness? These reality dioramas are clever studies of domesticity done with ingenious use of digital technology. Through April 23. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-989-7600.)

BRIAN MCKEE
These highly suggestive color prints of architectural ruins are so big and their elements so enticing that they make you want to go there. The Islamic arches, light pouring down stone stairs, abandoned niches, vaulted ceilings patterned in seven-pointed stars, Pompeian reds, and wine-dark blues are detached from any geographical context. This is the first solo U.S. exhibition by the twenty-seven-year-old photographer, who lives in Brooklyn and Vienna and who uses a nineteen-fifties eight-by-ten box camera and natural light. He gives no clue as to the location of his sacred precincts; the series, titled "Urbanus," is meant to evoke lost civilizations. Through April 9. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-744-7400.)

MARTINA MULLANEY
A white box of tissues sits on a rumpled white bedsheet close against a bare white wall in one of Mullaney's large color prints taken in homeless shelters and hostels in the U.K. These lonely pictures fuse a hardboiled documentary sensibility with an aesthetic finesse that constantly threatens to undermine the work. How can something so ugly—a soiled mattress, cracked plaster—be forced into an image that is so pretty? By leaving the people out of the frame and concentrating on the rumpled sheets and dirty blankets used day after day by who knows who, Mullaney avoids simply exploiting pathos. The wan greens or pinks of the walls are cut off by striped ticking or orange waffle-weave blankets two-thirds of the way down the images, all of which is unassailably beautiful, and makes for a strong U.S. début. Through April 30. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

STEPHEN SHORE
In the nineteen-seventies, along with William Eggleston, Shore elevated color film to the realm of artistry. The youngest photographer to have his work collected by MOMA—he was only fourteen then, in 1961—Shore spent the years between 1973 and 1978 taking photographs throughout the U.S. and Canada, calling the resulting series "Uncommon Places." Shot with an eight-by-ten view camera, which requires a long exposure, the rural and urban landscapes, interiors, and portraits at first appear to be banal shots of ugly places. But the care Shore took in composing the shots, his camera's capacity to record minute detail, and the lost color palette of the seventies make for an invaluable historic record as well as a true artist's most influential work—just ask Andreas Gursky. Through April 16. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070.)

Short List

MARK COHEN
Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930. Through April 2.

THOMAS RUFF
Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through April 2.

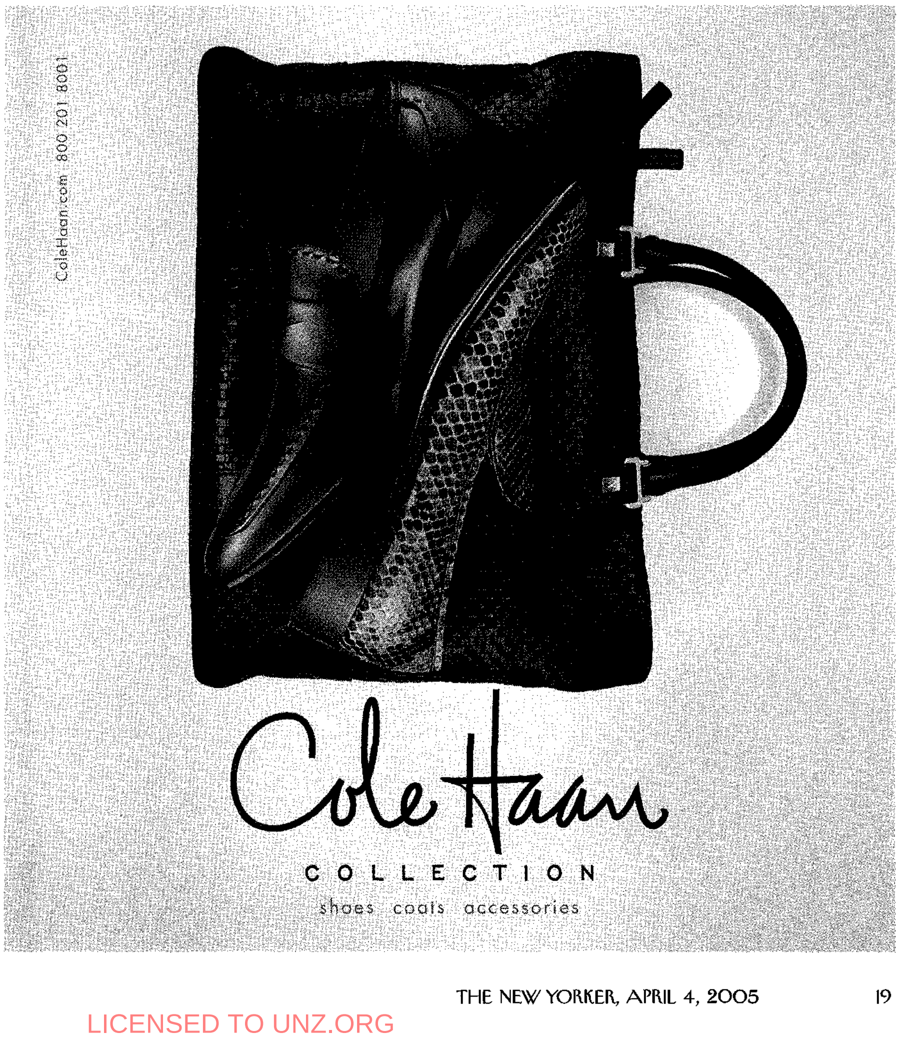
CHARLES H. TRAUB
Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868. Through April 2.

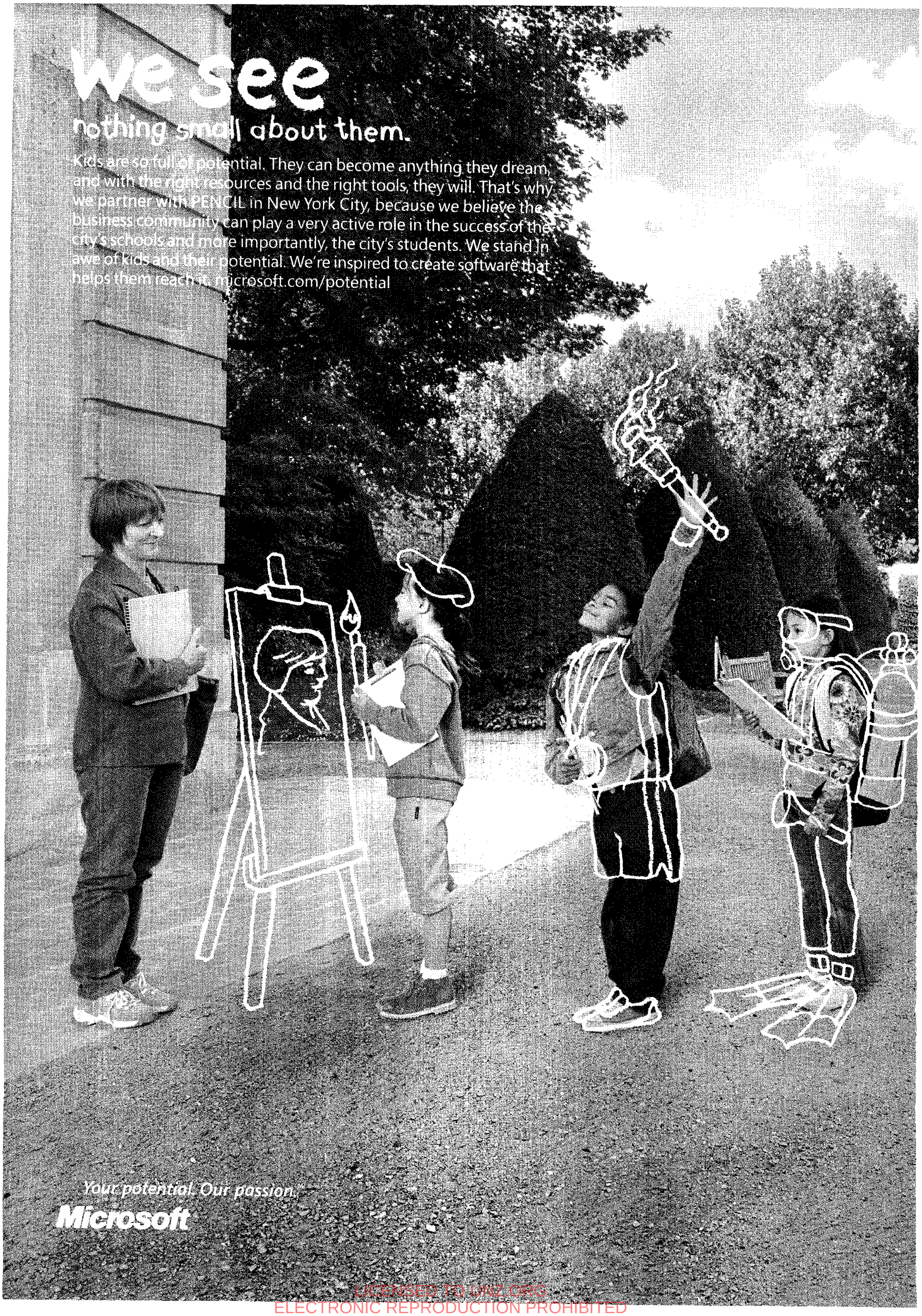
"(PEOPLE) IN SERIES, IN SEQUENCE"
Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through April 2.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
March 31 at 10:15 A.M. and 2 and April 1 at 10:15 A.M.: A three-part, two-day sale of Chinese ceramics and works of art features a fantastic bronze vessel, from the late Western Zhou dynasty, in the shape of a strange, birdlike creature (complete with antlers and fangs), along with an ornate full-length portrait of a Chinese maiden by a follower of Giuseppe Castiglione, an Italian Jesuit missionary who became a painter to the Qing-dynasty imperial court—in a charming mélange of Western and indigenous styles. The Pugh collection of snuff bottles, acquired over half a century, includes pieces in glass, jade, amber, coral, bronze, and painted crystal. ♦ April 1 at 10:15 A.M and 2: Most of the showstoppers in this sale of Southeast Asian art are in the first session, devoted to sculpture and statues; an elaborately dressed goddess standing in slight contrapposto and holding an inscribed sutra in her left hand, dated 600-650 A.D., is one of the oldest metal images from the Palola Shahi dynasty of Gilgit, in northwest India. The second session includes watercolor illustrations from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and modern Indian paintings. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
March 30 at 10:45 A.M. and 2: This sale of Chinese ceramics and works of art includes a remarkably preserved limestone head of Buddha that will soon celebrate thirteen hundred years of sedate contemplation. A bronze ritual food vessel from the late Shang dynasty is several centuries younger, but is expected to fetch ten times as much—nearly a million dollars—on account of its unusually large





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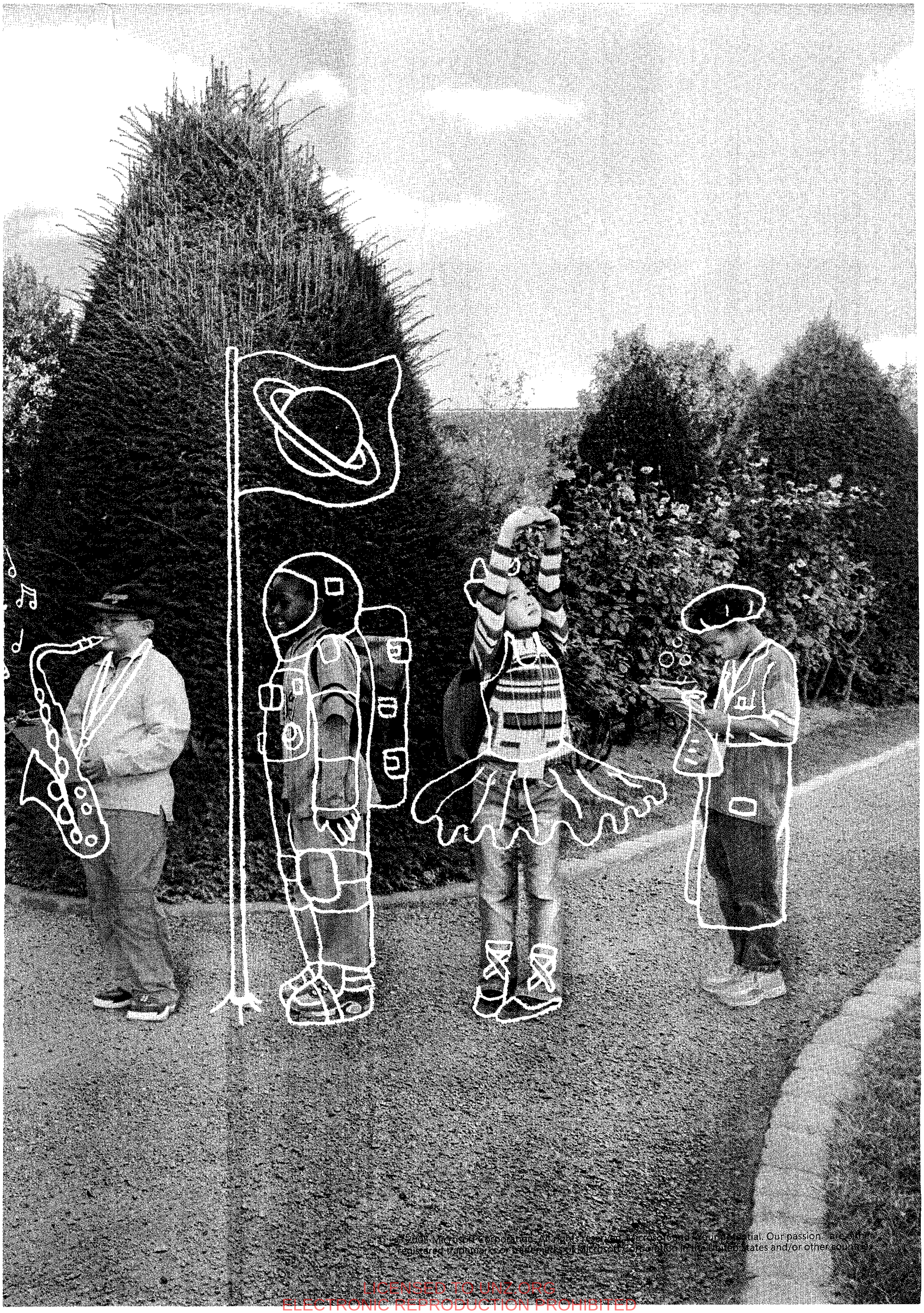

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size and rarity. ♦ March 31 at 10 A.M. and 2: This sale of Indian and Southeast Asian art is unabashedly eclectic; its offerings include an important ninth-century large bronze figure of Buddha from Thailand, valued at about half a million dollars, as well as an evocation of a more modern sage, in the Indian-born artist Francis Newton Souza's oil painting "Psychiatrist and Wife." ♦ April 5-6 at 10 A.M. and 2: The House Sale, featuring furniture (including a set of eight Russian neoclassic parcel-gilt and ebonized mahogany dining chairs), decorative objects, paintings, silver, and porcelain from the Quogue, New York, home of Norman and Susan Ember. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

Allan Tannenbaum's photograph of Martha Graham and Rudolph Nureyev in the show "New York in the 70s," at Tribute.

SWANN

April 2 at 2: It's hard not to feel like an excited, nerdy eleven-year-old when perusing the lots of this sale of objects from the history of space exploration: orbit charts, toothbrushes used and unused (all veterans of space flight), space-shuttle models, and a lunar-orbit-monitor chart, just in case you get lost navigating your next moon landing. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

ARTS OF PACIFIC ASIA SHOW

The show takes over the 69th Regiment Armory for its fourteenth presentation, a three-day affair in which a variety of art works and antiques from some eighty-one dealers can be savored at a relaxed pace. (Lexington Ave. at 25th St. 212-289-0496. April 1-3.)

INTERNATIONAL ASIAN ART FAIR

Dealers from America, Europe, and the Far East gather to offer a wide selection of art works and decorative objects. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-642-8572. April 1-6.)

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OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

March 30 at 7:30 and April 2 at 12:30: The highlight of this revival of Nathaniel Merrill's sumptuous production of **"Der Rosenkavalier"** is the Met début of the soprano Angela Denoke; she uses her occasionally wayward upper-range pitch to her advantage, creating a memorable Marschallin whose aristocratic grace is leavened with a painfully transparent vulnerability. Also with Susan Graham (a strapping Octavian), Laura Aikin, Håkan Hagegård, and Peter Rose; Donald Runnicles conducts, giving the music a nearly ideal blend of lyrical phrasing and forward drive. (These are the final performances.) ♦ March 31 and April 5 at 8: **"Tosca,"** with Maria Guleghina, Salvatore Licitra, and Mark Delevan; James Conlon. ♦ April 1 at 8: Gerald Finley and Samuel Ramey lead the cast in a revival of **"Don Giovanni,"** as the Don and his long-suffering manservant, Leporello. Tamar Iveri and Adina Nitescu, as Donna Anna and Donna Elvira, and Jonathan Lemalu, as Masetto, are all making their Met débuts; also with Isabel Bayrakdarian, Richard Croft, and Paata Burchuladze; Philippe Jordan. ♦ April 2 at 7:30: The final performance of **"Don Carlo,"** with Sondra Radvanovsky (a superb Elizabeth), Violeta Urmana, Eduardo Villa (in the title role), Ferruccio Furlanetto, and Burchuladze; Fabio Luisi. ♦ April 4 at 8: Debora Voigt, going from strength to strength this season, takes the role of Amelia in a revival of **"Un Ballo in Maschera,"** joining Rosemary Joshua, Marianne Cornetti, Marcello Giordani, and Carlos Alvarez; James Conlon. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

March 31 at 7:30 and April 2 at 8: **"Carmen,"** with Melanie Vaccari, Katharine Goeldner (in the title role), John Bellemer, and Malcolm MacKenzie; Steven White conducts. ♦ April 1 at 8: Chas Rader-Shieber's production of Handel's **"Orlando,"** featuring the sopranos Jennifer Aylmer and Amy Burton and the countertenor Bejun Mehta (who excelled in the Met's recent "Rodelinda"); Antony Walker. ♦ April 2 at 1:30: Lori Phillips, a Turandot of note at the house, takes the title role in a revival of **"Madama Butterfly,"** with Jennifer Hines, Gerard Powers, and John Packard; Steven Mosteller. ♦ April 3 at 1:30: Long derided as kitsch because of its California Gold Rush milieu (Webern knew better), **"La Fanciulla del West"** is in fact the noblest of Puccini's operas, a work that speaks eloquently to the potential of ordinary people. Last summer's Glimmerglass production may have crowded a bit too much detail onto what was basically a unit set, but it did no damage to the lyrical density of the score. City Opera's presentation offers Stephanie Friede, Renzo Zulian, and Stephen Kechulius in the leading roles; George Manahan, City Opera's music director, conducts. (New York State Theatre. 212-307-4100.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

The "Visions of the Beyond" festival seems like a pretty thin strand on which to hang a number of composers (Mendelssohn, Ligeti, Messiaen, etc.) whose works have little to do with one another. But the guest performers are first-rate. Next is Berlioz's "Damnation de Faust," conducted by Charles Dutoit, whose Berlioz interpretations are a marriage of luxurious sound and carefully plotted structure. Susanne Mentzer, Paul Groves, Christopher Feigum, and Willard White are the vocal soloists, assisted by the Westminster Symphonic Choir and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. March 31 and April 5 at 7:30 and April 2 at 8.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S: "POSTCARDS FROM PRAGUE"

Donald Runnicles, taking some time away from "Der Rosenkavalier," conducts the city's most versatile freelance orchestra for a program of works by Janáček, Martinů, and an illustrious Austrian visitor, Mozart (the "Prague" Symphony and the Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major); Ivan Moravec, the doyen of Czech pianists, is the soloist. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 31 at 8.)

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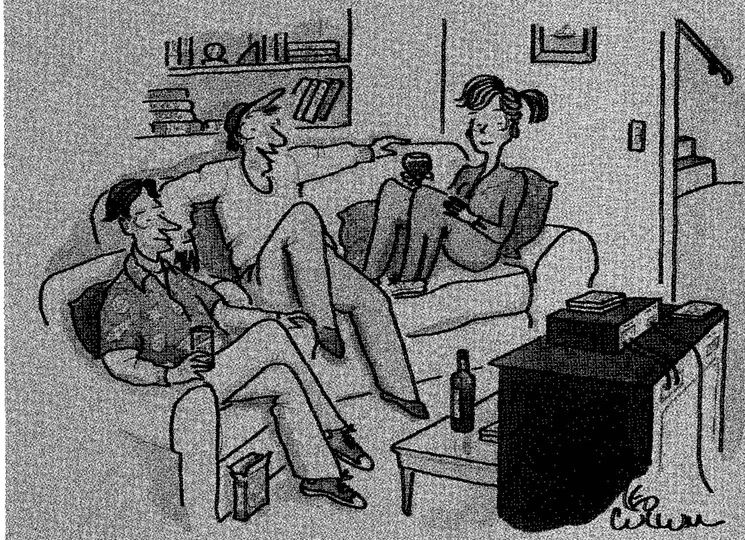

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Yundi Li, the elegant and insightful young Deutsche Grammophon artist, slips into Carnegie Hall as soloist with this excellent ensemble in Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor. Works by Tchaikovsky (the Fifth Symphony) and Lena Auerbach complete the program; Alexander Treger conducts. (212-247-7800. April 2 at 8.)

KIROV ORCHESTRA
This preëminent Russian orchestra is a dark and thrilling instrument, led by a charismatic maestro—Valery Gergiev—who always seems just a few inches ahead of the storm. April 4 at 8: Yefim Bronfman is the guest for an evening of music by Sibelius (the Symphony No. 7), Prokofiev (the Piano Concerto No. 1 in D-Flat Major), Tchaikovsky, and Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition"). ♦ April 5 at 8: Rimsky-Korsakov's "Capriccio Espagnol," Sibelius's Violin Concerto (with Leonidas Kavakos), and the Second Symphonies of Prokofiev and Borodin. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. The series concludes on April 6.)

RECITALS

MARTHA ARGERICH AND NELSON FREIRE
Two old friends team up to offer classic two-piano works by Brahms (the "Haydn Variations"), Rachmaninoff, Lutoslawski, Schubert, and Ravel ("La Valse"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 30 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
March 31 and April 1 at 7:30: The Claremont Duo plays music for cello and guitar by Boccherini, Fauré, Falla, Piazzolla, and others. ♦ April 2 at 7:30 and April 3 at 4: The Amernet String Quartet plays music by two great vocal composers, Wolf and Verdi (the Quartet in E Minor), before launching into the Piano Quintet by Vittorio Giannini (with James Tocco, an admired American-music specialist). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

SEQUITUR
Harold Meltzer's expert ensemble, an entente between the uptown and downtown wings of American modernism, performs music by Eric Moe ("Tri-Stan," a new work on texts by David Foster Wallace), Roberto Sierra, and Meltzer ("Exiles," diaphanous settings of Crane and Aiken texts), featuring the singers Mary Nessinger, Judith Kellock, and Richard Lalli. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 31 at 8.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
April 1 at 8: The Beaux Arts Trio's three-year Beethoven project—a survey of all of the cello and violin sonatas and the piano trios—continues with performances of the Piano Trio in G Major, Op. 1, No. 2, and other works. ♦ April 2 at 8: Steve Reich, another fêted composer at the museum this year, leads his eponymous ensemble, which will perform "Clapping Music" and "Three Tales," an opera with video by his wife, Beryl Korot. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Two programs combine the Schubert Piano Trios (performed by Cho-Liang Lin, Gary Hoffman, and André-Michel Schub), bulwarks of the repertoire, with a selection of the composer's songs. April 1 at 8: The baritone Nathan Gunn, accompanied by his wife, Julie Gunn, sings "Viola," "Der Taubenpost," and other lieder, before a performance of the Trio No. 1 in B-Flat Major. ♦ April 3 at 5: The soprano Heidi Grant Murphy and her husband, the pianist Kevin Murphy, perform such favorites as "Du Bist die Ruh" and "Die Forelle"; the Trio No. 2 in E-Flat Major follows. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

RUSSELL SHERMAN
The venerable Boston pianist, celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday, brings his graceful touch and penetrating mind to music by Beethoven (the Sonata No. 4 in E-Flat Major), Debussy, Bartók, and Liszt (including "Réminiscences de Don Juan"). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. April 2 at 8.)

BORODIN STRING QUARTET
Valentin Berlinsky, the quartet's original cellist and a close colleague of Shostakovich, anchors this renowned Russian group, who will perform that com-

poser's Quartet No. 3, along with works by Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 2 at 8.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: MAGNIFICAT
The San Francisco ensemble—four female singers, a male "celebrant," and a continuo group—performs a setting of the Easter Mass ("Messa Paschali") by the seventeenth-century Milanese nun Chiara Margarita Cozzolani. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. April 3 at 4.)

JUILLIARD PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE
Daniel Druckman, the Philharmonic's assistant principal percussionist, directs the group in new and recent works by Christopher Rouse, Giancinto Scelsi, and others. (Alice Tully Hall. April 4 at 8. For free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

"PULLING STRINGS: VIOLINISTS ON FILM"
Lincoln Center begins its annual series of classical-music films with "The Art of the Violin," Bruno Monsaingeon's two-part paean to the instrument's great virtuosi (see This Week). (Walter Reade Theatre. 212-721-6500. April 5 at 7.)

EMERSON STRING QUARTET
The world's leading quartet brings its matchless technical acuity to music by Mendelssohn (three works, including the String Quartet No. 4 in E Minor) and Schubert (the grand, valedictory Quartet No. 15 in G Major). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. April 5 at 7:30.)

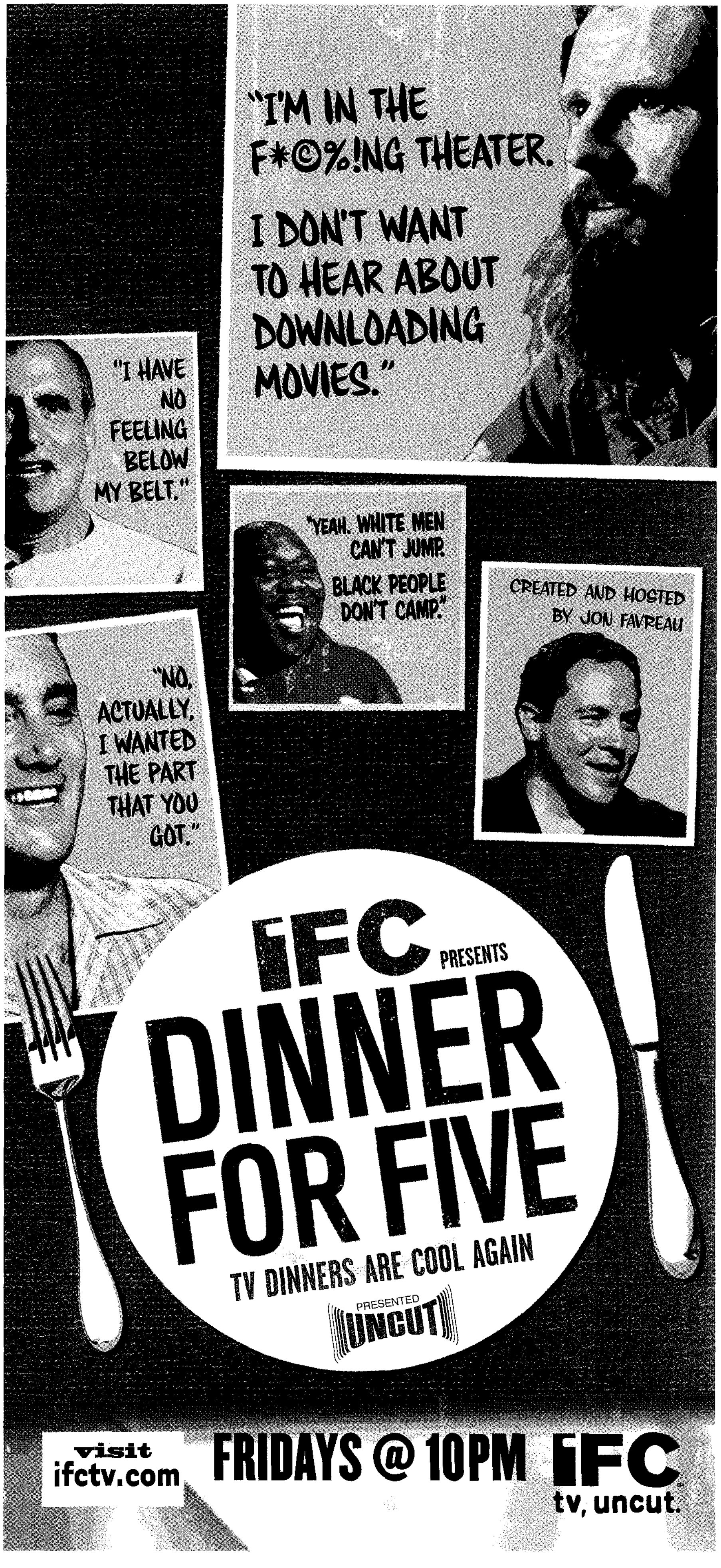
CONCERTANTE
The vibrant young string sextet offers music by Dvořák (the "Terzetto"), Goossens, and Brahms (the Sextet No. 2 in G Major). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. April 5 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

ROLLER DERBY
Gotham Girls Roller Derby, the city's self-proclaimed only all-girl league, kicks off its 2005 season with a rematch between last year's controversial winners, the Brooklyn Bombshells, and the hot-for-revenge Manhattan Mayhem. The bout takes place on April Fool's Day, but this rivalry is no joke. (Bronx Skate Key, 220 E. 138th St. 917-749-9278. April 1 at 8.)

READINGS
March 29 at 6: Paul Auster offers selections from his new book of collected prose. (Coliseum Books, 11 W. 42nd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ April 1 at 1: The award-winning translator Clayton Eshleman reads works by famous and not so famous Surrealists from his anthology "Conductors of the Pit." (133 Beekman St., South Street Seaport. No tickets necessary.) ♦ April 3 at 4: Gary Mex Glazner reads from and discusses his book "How to Make a Living as a Poet." (Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery. For more information, call 212-614-0505.) ♦ April 5 at 7: Readings of poems from around the world by Caroline Knox, Jeffrey Yang, and Matvei Yankelevich. The event celebrates the publication of a new edition of the poetry journal *Circumference*. (Swiss Institute-Contemporary Art, 495 Broadway, between Broome and Spring Sts. 212-925-2035.)

TALKS
March 30 at 7: The author, radio personality, and voice-over artist Sarah Vowell (she played the daughter, Violet, in "The Incredibles") discusses her new book, "Assassination Vacation." (New York Public Library, Celeste Bartos Forum, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-868-4444.) ♦ March 30 at 12:30: The writer Burton R. Pollin discusses Edgar Allan Poe's influence on later writers. (Donnell Library Center, 20 W. 53rd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 30 at 7:30: Caleb Smith talks about his walks through more than five hundred miles of Manhattan streets. (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. 212-601-1000.) ♦ March 31 at 7: James Grant, author of "John Adams: Party of One," speaks at the Old Stone House in Brooklyn; reception to follow. (J. J. Byrne Park, 3rd St. between Fourth and Fifth Aves. For reservations, call 718-768-3195.) ♦ March 31 at 7: Pete Hamill leads a discussion with Thomas Kelly, Geoffrey Wolff, and Roger Angell on the life and work of John O'Hara. (Silverstein Lounge, New York University, 100 Washington Sq. E. For information, call 212-998-3950.)



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MOVIES OPENING

BEAUTY SHOP
A single mother from Chicago (Queen Latifah) opens a salon in Atlanta, in a comedy directed by Bille Woodruff. Opening March 30.

DUST TO GLORY
A documentary about the Baja 1000 off-road race, directed by Dana Brown ("Step Into Liquid"). Opening April 1. (Union Square.)

GIRL PLAY
Two actresses unexpectedly fall in love while rehearsing a play, in a romantic comedy directed by Lee Friedlander. Opening April 1. (Quad Cinema.)

KONTROLL
A high-style, high-speed thriller set in the Budapest subway system. Directed by Nimród Antal. In Hungarian. Opening April 1. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

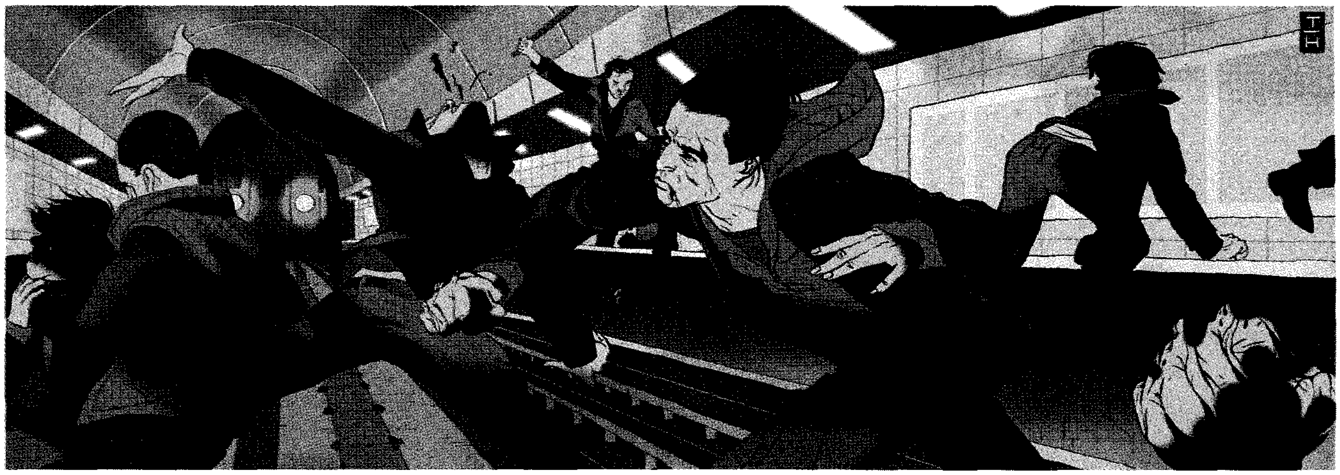
LOOK AT ME
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 1. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ODESSA . . . ODESSA!
Elderly Jews expound on their nostalgia for the Old Country, in a documentary directed by Michale Boganim. Opening March 30. (Pioneer Theatre.)

SIN CITY
Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller co-directed the adaptation of Miller's graphic novels. With Bruce Willis, Jessica Alba, and Benicio Del Toro (see This Week). Opening April 1.

FILM NOTES

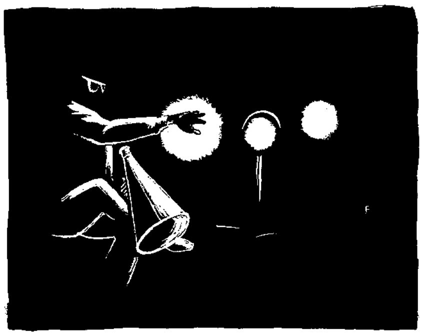
THE BALLAD OF JACK & ROSE
Naïvely bad. Daniel Day-Lewis, gaunt, pale, and wearing an awful little hat, plays an aging, arrogant counterculture environmentalist living on an island in 1986 in perfect harmony with his teen-age daughter (Camilla Belle). He brings his mainland girlfriend (Catherine Keener) and her two sons into the house, and everything goes haywire. There are stupid quarrels, a loaded gun that goes off, a snake that comes out from under the bed when two of the kids fornicate. Everything is shot so close in that you can't actually see the actors half the time. Nothing that the hero does makes much sense—the movie seems to be an exposure of his futility. This awkwardly stupid mess was written and directed by Rebecca Miller, who is Day-Lewis's wife; Miller seems to have plugged all too successfully into the actor's self-mortifying side. With Beau Bridges as a real-estate developer.—*David Denby* (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)



Nimród Antal's "Kontroll" screens in "New Directors/New Films" on March 30-31 and opens in theatres on April 1.

TOMER HANUKA

BE COOL
It's too slovenly to be cool. This sequel to the heavenly "Get Shorty," one of the best American movies of the mid-nineties, brings back the black-suited ex-loan shark Chili Palmer (John Travolta), who, after becoming a Hollywood producer in the original, decides to take on the Los Angeles music business. "Get Shorty" was a satirical love letter to a corrupt milieu, but this sequel says that the music business is about money and nothing else, so the love drops out of the comedy, which descends from satire to burlesque. Vince Vaughn, however, is consistently funny as Raji, a manager who wants to be black and delivers such locutions as "Stop hating, start participating. C'mon, twinkle, twinkle, baby." Directed, lamely, by F. Gary Gray. From an Elmore Leonard novel.—*D.D.* (3/7/05) (Battery Park 11, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Magic Johnson Theatres, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)



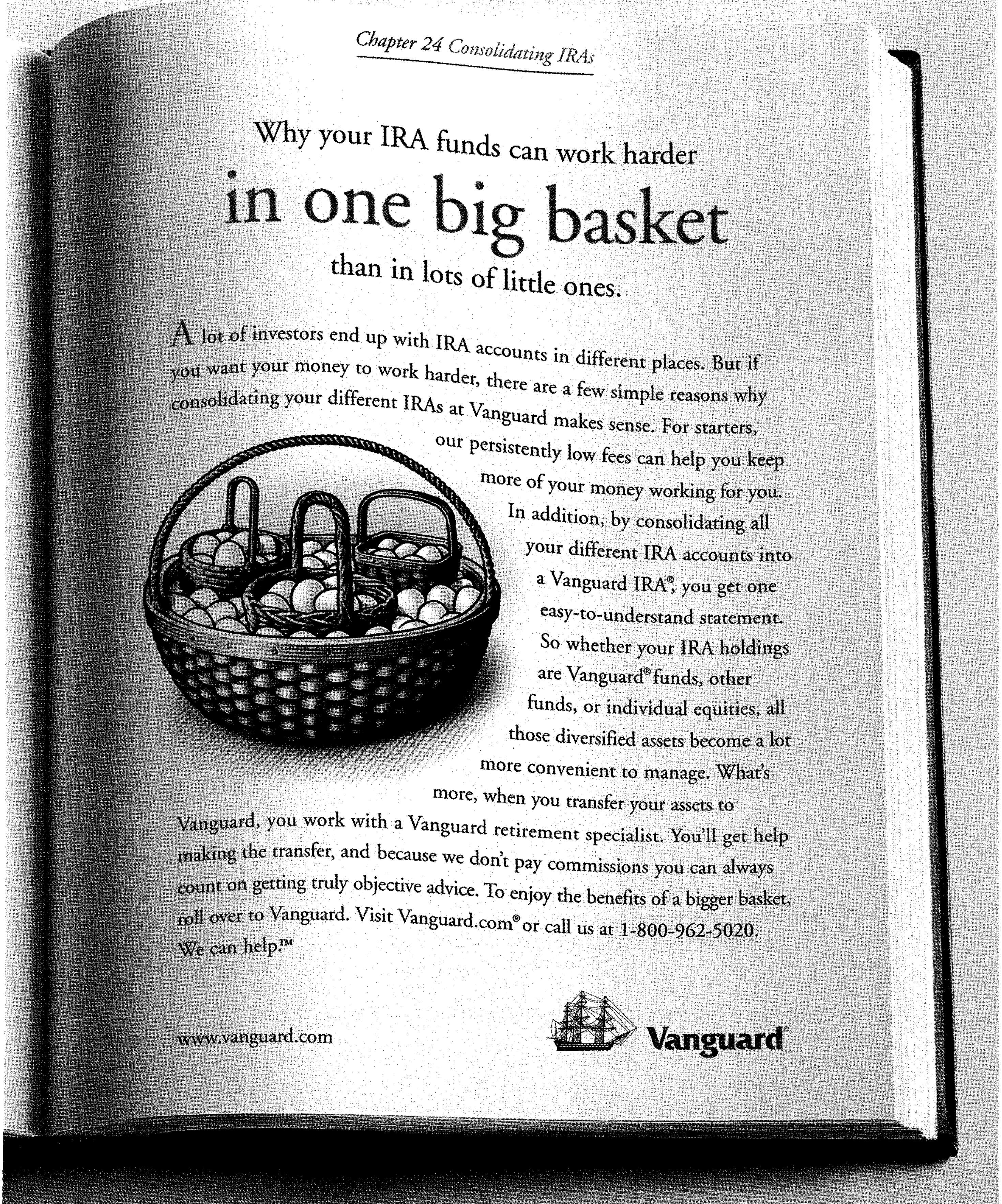
THE BLUE ANGEL
Adapted from Heinrich Mann's novel "Professor Unrath," Josef von Sternberg's 1930 film deals with the breakdown of an authoritarian personality. Emil Jannings plays the inhibited, tyrannical high-school instructor who is prudishly indignant about his students' visiting Lola Lola (Marlene Dietrich), the singer at the Blue Angel; he goes to the café to put a stop to it and instead succumbs to her callous, impassive sexuality. Dietrich's Lola Lola is a rather coarse, plump young beauty; as she sings "Falling in Love Again," her smoldering voice and sadistic indifference suggest sex without romance, love, or sentiment. The pedant becomes her husband, her slave, her stooge; he travels with the café troupe, hawking dirty pictures of his wife. Dietrich is extraordinary, and "The Blue Angel" is a movie you can admire sequence by sequence, because it's made in an imaginative, atmospheric style, yet you may feel that you don't really like it on an emotional level; the sexual humiliation gets very heavy in the scenes in which the teacher, now a clown, returns to his home town and to his old classroom. In German.—*Pauline Kael* (Moving Image; April 2-3.)

BORN INTO BROTHELS
Watching Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman's prize-winning documentary, shot in Calcutta's Sonagachi red-light district, where Briski lived, on and off, for years, one is initially held by the sensuousness of the colors and the beauty of the children—the offspring of prostitutes, eight, nine, twelve years old, who are growing up in the district and are surely heading into prostitution themselves. Then the "plot" of the movie kicks in. Briski gives the children cameras and teaches them to take pictures of their surroundings; they gain a sense of themselves, and they master a craft. But will Briski be able to get them out of the brothels (where their parents need them for economic reasons) and into decent schools? One is aware of Briski as a rather aggressive guardian angel from the West, who comes in and tries to save only a few children, but she's hardheaded and effective, and her quest makes sense.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Metro Twin, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

BRIDE AND PREJUDICE
Ridiculous, but immensely enjoyable. Jane Austen's most enduringly popular story done as a Bollywood musical comedy, with Martin Henderson as Darcy, a callow American millionaire, and the ravishing Aishwarya Rai as the smartly alert Elizabeth Bennet figure, known here as Lalita, one of four highly nubile daughters living in Amritsar. The ballroom scene is turned into a sprightly Bollywood production number; in the street bazaars, cross-dressers and goofy guys with turbans break into dance. It's a travesty, of course, but also an exuberant, good-hearted movie, and it won't corrupt you or Jane Austen. Directed by Gurinder Chadha.—*D.D.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Paris, and Union Square.)

DEAR FRANKIE
Shona Auerbach's directorial début is part soap opera, part fairy tale, but thoroughly Scottish, which gives it a welcome wee bit of weight. Lizzie (Emily Mortimer) has been a single parent to Frankie (Jack McElhone), who is deaf, for nearly all of his nine and a half years. For reasons we discover gradually, she's told Frankie that his absent father is a working sailor, and the boy writes him newsy, expressive letters; Lizzie intercepts them and replies with block-printed notes from exotic ports of call. When Frankie finds out that the ship he's been writing to is scheduled to dock nearby, Lizzie extends the elaborate ruse, hiring a guy (Gerard Butler) to pretend he's Frankie's dad. Auerbach (doubling as cinematographer here) has a quiet, confident command of the material, and the three leads are admirable. With lovely, foggy views of the western Scottish coast.—*Ken Marks* (Lincoln Square and Village East Cinemas.)

DOWNFALL
The great Swiss-German actor Bruno Ganz gives a staggering performance as Adolf Hitler in this full-scale realist German production detailing the last ten days of the Third Reich. As the Red Army rampages through Berlin, Hitler and his staff have retreated to the bunker under the Reich Chancellery. They are all here—Himmler, Goebbels, Speer, the entire fascinating, loathsome crew of commanders, mad visionaries, and toadies (all brilliantly acted)—and, leading them still, a man so physically ill and constricted in move-



Chapter 24 Consolidating IRAs

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ment that he looks like a broken-down puppet from a Bavarian travelling circus. The puppet comes to life, of course, in appalling self-pitying rants that are borderline funny. The entire movie teeters on the edge of sick comedy—in particular such scenes as the deaths of the Goebbels children, one by one, at the hands of their mother—and at times one longs for a coldly malicious ironist like Brecht or Fassbinder to come in and take over. Produced and written by Bernd Eichinger; directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. In German.—*D.D.* (2/14 & 21/05) (Film Forum.)

GUNNER PALACE

In late 2003 and early 2004, the filmmakers Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlein hung out with the men and women of an American field-artillery unit in Baghdad and came back with this fragmentary but suggestive report. The company is billeted in a former palace that had belonged to Saddam's son Uday, a building that looks like a gigantic, crumbling Miami Beach hotel. At night, in scary raids, the soldiers break into the houses of suspected bombmakers and often find nothing. Mostly very young, they are baffled and frustrated by a situation in which they are received not (as they had been told) as liberators but essentially as occupiers.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center.)

"Dust to Glory," a documentary by Dana Brown, opening April 1.

ZOHAR LAZAR

HEAD-ON

Two people meet in the hospital, brought together by suicidal tendencies: such is the cheerful starting point of Fatih Akin's new film. Set first in Hamburg and then in Istanbul, it traces the curious rapport between the sullen Cahit (Birol Ünel) and the flaky, lustrous Sibel (Sibel Güner). In a way, theirs is a love story in reverse: they set off in mistrust, move to indifference, slide into a marriage of convenience, begin to notice and value one another, and finally ascend to a state of ineradicable need. Even then, fortune dams their happiness; Akin's movie may be enlivened by a savage energy, but beneath it flows a quiet and rueful pessimism. He has delved into an obvious place—the predicament of Turkish workers in modern Germany—and come up with a consuming tale, forcing us to wonder why directors in the U.S. aren't turning to their own immigrant communities and finding similar treasures. Featuring fine supporting turns from Catrin Striebeck (butch and unabashed) and Güven Kiraç (benign and tubby). In German and Turkish (listen carefully for the switch between the two).—*Anthony Lane* (3/14/05) (Village East Cinemas.)

HITCH

In this modern screwball comedy, Will Smith exerts his considerable charm as a swift, super-knowing "date doctor" who advises men of less than extraordinary appearance how to woo the women of their dreams. Smith's principal student is a heavyset accountant, played by the TV-comedy actor Kevin James, who is light on his feet in the tradition of such buoyant heavies as Zero Mostel and Jackie Gleason and possibly just as talented as those two. The movie is too long for what it has to say, but much of it is good-hearted fun. Written by Kevin Bisch; directed by Andy Tennant.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Magic Johnson Theatres, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE

Or, the difference between law and justice, but with a twist: in John Ford's West, the letter of the law will die unjustly unless the spirit of the law—justice, in the self-evident person of John Wayne—commits murder to save it. From start to finish, the printed word frames the action: the lawless Liberty (Lee Marvin) strews the lawbooks of an Easterner attorney (James Stewart) in the dust and whips him near to death; the central love story turns on lessons in reading and writing. At the end, a local journalist delivers his resignedly ambivalent credo: "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." In print, one may have to choose, but Ford, on film, shows both the rousing legend and the humbling truth. Any doubt about Ford's sense of higher mission resounds each time Wayne calls Stewart—with just enough sarcasm to conceal his reverence—"pilgrim." Released in 1962.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum; March 30-31.)

MELINDA AND MELINDA

At dinner with friends in a Greenwich Village restaurant, two playwrights, one tragic (Larry Pine), one comic (Wallace Shawn), offer alternate versions of the same story: Melinda (Radha Mitchell), a distraught young woman, shows up, unannounced, at a dinner party held by old friends and intrudes upon their lives. The dramatic framework of Woody Allen's new movie is ambitious, but an odd sort of indifference or blindness seems to have overcome him during production. Mitchell is surrounded by different actors in each version, but it's surprisingly hard to tell the two stories apart. The general atmosphere of both stories and even some of the characters are very similar: both are set in Woodyland, that familiar elegant fantasy version of Manhattan, impeccably furnished, with no brightness, no neon, no pop culture anywhere, and the characters are largely a nattering, trivial, shallowly self-serving bunch. Mitchell is a fine young actress, but Allen pushes her so far into the fidgets that one rather dreads her next appearance. One leaves with such sour thoughts as, The inability to pull oneself together is neither tragic nor comic; it's just a waste of energy. With Will Ferrell, Amanda Peet, Jonny Lee Miller, and Chloë Sevigny.—*D.D.* (3/21/05) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.)

MILLIONS

In a surprisingly sunny suburb of Manchester, two motherless little boys—one pious and generous (Alex Etel), the other enterprising and manipulative (Lewis McGibbon)—gain control of a Nike bag filled with cash after thieves throw it off a moving train. Will the secretive boys invest the money, give it to the poor, spend it on video games? And when will the nasty blackguards who stole the money show up, eager to recover the swag? "Millions," written by Frank Cottrell Boyce and directed by Danny Boyle, should have had the enchantment of "Empire of the Sun" or the recent Italian film "I'm Not Scared" or a dozen other child-centered stories and movies, but Boyle can't stop showing off his virtuosity. He changes camera speeds, zips through sequences, sends things flying through the air. We're supposed to be overwhelmed by magic, but what we see is fancy film technique and a lot of overstrained whimsy. To use special effects without coming off as glib, you may have to be a boy at heart yourself.—*D.D.* (3/21/05) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

OLDBOY

A man named Oh Dae-su (Choi Min-sik) is imprisoned in a room for fifteen years, not by the state but by the anonymous bearer of a grudge. On his release, he goes in search of revenge, with the aid of a fetching sushi chef. Upon this unusual plot, which manages to seem at once slender and wholly implausible, the South Korean director Park Chan-wook has constructed a highly wrought, low-lit piece of gothic, worrying away at our senses without pausing to check that his story makes any sense. Scenes branch off one from another in a gruelling phantasmagoria that is best approached in a spirit of bitter comedy, or after a few drinks; if you want to follow the progress of subcutaneous insects, or to see a man ingest a live octopus, then this is the movie for you. There is no doubting the finesse of the director's eye, or the calmness with which even his most savage sequences are composed, but the result feels unappealingly pleased with itself, trapped in its obligation to shock. As for the solution to the mystery, don't wait up. In Korean.—*A.L.* (3/28/05) (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

THE RING TWO

A sequel to the horror hit of 2002, with Naomi Watts returning to the role—demanding, yet drab and oddly fruitless—of Rachel Keller, a single mother with a freaky son (David Dorfman). They have moved to a small town to get away from a long-haired ghost named Samara (Kelly Stables), who made their life hell in the previous movie and who now, needless to say, wastes no time whatsoever in rolling up to finish what she started. What you get for your money is a brace of decent shocks, a spray of special effects (look out for the upward-raining bathwater), and almost no sense of dread. This is a great shame, because the director is Hideo Nakata, who made the two original "Ringu" movies in Japan in the late nineteen-nineties, and whose command of atmosphere—invariably dark, moist, and clouded with premonition—seemed instinctive enough to survive a change of location. But something in the American project foils or escapes him, and the new work tends to plod where it should shiver and creep. With Sissy Spacek as the patient in a psychiatric institution who Tells Us What It All Means.—*A.L.* (3/28/05) (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Magic Johnson Theatres, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

STEAMBOY

The director Katsuhiro Ôtomo's first anime feature since "Akira" (1988). In that picture, the city in danger was a futuristic Tokyo; this time it's a futuristic nineteenth-century London. Ray, the title character, is a third-generation mechanical genius thrust into the middle of an adventure set in motion by the Steam Ball, a powerful invention of his grandfather's. It's an allegory about corporate greed, man's warlike nature, and the proper use of science, none of it very subtle. Ôtomo displays great imagination mixing the real mechanical marvels of 1866 with his own fantastical creations, and "Steamboy" is often inspiringly good-looking, offering panoramic views of London and high-velocity action, but the characters are as flat as their facial expressions. With the voices of Anna Paquin, Alfred Molina, and Patrick Stewart in the English-language version.—*K.M.* (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE UPSIDE OF ANGER

Reviewed in The Current Cinema. (Cinemas 1 and 2, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

In Mike Nichols's début movie, from 1966, four actors caught at pivotal moments in their careers play out Edward Albee's pop-Strindberg rendition of death-grip marriages. Richard Burton, in his existential-loathing phase, is George, the passed-over associate professor; Elizabeth Taylor, entering her banshee period, is his wife, Martha, the college president's daughter; and George Segal and Sandy Dennis are the golden-boy biologist and ditzy spouse drawn into their sexual parlor games. Segal develops the comical grimace that would become his trademark, while Dennis goes through what looks and sounds like a G-rated version of Tourette's syndrome. Taylor has funny bits (such as her camp-classic Bette Davis number), but Burton gives the performance of the movie, bringing out the furtive canniness of a man who exposes everyone's limits and can't rise above his own. Unfortunately, Nichols overworks angst at the expense of black comedy. The producer, Ernest Lehman, edited Albee's drama into a screenplay.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; April 1.)

ALSO PLAYING

MILK & HONEY

Quad Cinema.

MONDOVINO

Film Forum.

NINA'S TRAGEDIES

First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.

ROBOTS

Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Magic Johnson Theatres, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Magic Johnson Theatres, Frederick Douglass Blvd. at 125th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182).
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—"New Filmmakers Goes South." March 30 at 8: "I Hate São Paulo" (2003, Dardo Toledo Barros; in Portuguese). ♦ "Anthology Preservations." March 30 at 8: Taylor Mead's home movies. ♦ "The *Onion* Presents." March 31 at 8: "Space Is the Place" (1974, John Coney). ♦ "Essential Cinema." April 1 at 7:30: "Ordet" (1955, Carl Theodor Dreyer; in Danish, no subtitles). ♦ April 2 at 3:30: "October" (1927, Sergei Eisenstein; in Russian). ♦ April 2 at 6: "Vampyr" (1932; Dreyer; in Danish, no subtitles). ♦ April 2 at 7: "Ivan the Terrible, Parts I & II" (1945 and 1958, Eisenstein; in Russian, no subtitles). ♦ April 3 at 4: "Day of Wrath" (1943, Dreyer; in Danish, no subtitles). ♦ April 3 at 6: "The Parson's Widow" (1920, Dreyer; silent, with German intertitles). ♦ "Underworld Cinema." April 2 at 8: "Peep Show" (1965, J. X. Williams).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Through April 19: "Who's Afraid of Mike Nichols?" March 31 at 7: "The Graduate" (1967). ♦ April 1 at 7:30: "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" (†). ♦ April 2 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Carnal Knowledge" (1971). ♦ April 3 at 2: "Angels in America" (2003). ♦ The Fifth Annual Brooklyn Jewish Film Festival. April 5 at 4:30: "The Mad Adventures of Rabbi Jacob" (1973, Gérard Oury; in French, English, Hebrew, and Yiddish). ♦ April 5 at 7: "The Grand Role" (2004, Steve Suissa; in French).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through March 31: "Essential Westerns." March 30-31 at 1:10, 5:20, and 9:30: "Ride the High Country" (1962, Sam Peckinpah). ♦ March 30-31 at 3 and 7:10: "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" (†). ♦ Through April 6: "The Early Sturges: Preston Sturges Screenplays, 1930-1939." April 1-2 at 1:25, 4:45, and 8:05: "The Power and the Glory" (1933, William K. Howard). ♦ April 1-2 at 3, 6:20, and 9:40: "Easy Living" (1937, Mitchell Leisen). ♦ April 3-4 at 1:30, 5:15, and 9: "The Good Fairy" (1935, William Wyler). ♦ April 3-4 at 3:25 and 7:10: "Remember the Night" (1940, Leisen). ♦ April 5 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40: "Thirty Day Princess" (1934, Marion Gering). ♦ April 5 at 2:30, 5:50, and 9:10: "Strictly Dishonorable" (1931, John M. Stahl).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Special screening. March 30 at 8: "The Man Who Laughs" (1928, Paul Leni; silent). ♦ Through April 26: "Paris Series." April 5 at 12:30 and 7: "Moral Tales I & II" (1962-1963, Eric Rohmer; in French). ♦ April 5 at 4: "Six in Paris" (1965, Claude Chabrol, Rohmer, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean Douchet, Jean Rouch, and Jean-Daniel Pollet; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through April 3: "New Directors/New Films" (see listing below). ♦ "Friday Night at the Movies." April 1 at 5: "Hoop Dreams" (1994, Steve James). ♦ "112 Years of Cinema." April 4 at 5:30: "The Cat and the Canary" (1927, Paul Leni). ♦ April 4 at 6: "Real Women Have Curves" (2002, Patricia Cardoso). ♦ April 4 at 7:45: "I'll Be Seeing You" (1945, William Dieterle).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Asian CineVisions." April 1 at 7:30: "Joint Security Area" (2000, Park Chanwook; in Korean). ♦ Marx Brothers films. April 2 at 2: "Animal Crackers" (1930, Victor Heerman). ♦ April 2 at 4 and April 3 at 2: "A Night at the Opera" (1932, Sam Wood). ♦ April 3 at 4: "A Day at the Races" (1937, Wood). ♦ Repertory nights. April 2-3 at 6:30: "The Blue Angel" (†).

"NEW DIRECTORS/NEW FILMS"

Presented by the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the Museum of Modern Art. The festival, which runs through April 3, shows films at three different venues. See www.filmlinc.com for locations. (212-875-5050)—March 30 at 6 and 8:45 and March 31 at 9: "Kontroll" (2004, Nimród Antal; in Hungarian). ♦ March 30 at 6 and April 1 at 8:45: "The Devil and Daniel Johnston" (2005, Jeff Feuerzeig). ♦ March 30 at 9: "Clorox, Ammonia and Coffee" (2004, Mona J. Hoel; in Norwegian). ♦ March 31 at 6 and April 3 at 6: "L'Esquive" (2004, Abdellatif Kechiche; in French). ♦ March 31 at 6: "Private" (2004, Saverio Costanzo; in Arabic, English, and Hebrew). ♦ March 31 at 8:30 and April 2 at 3:15: "South of the Clouds" (2004, Zhu Wen; in Mandarin). ♦ April 1 at 6 and April 3 at 3:15: "Starlit High Noon" (2005, Nakagawa Yosuke; in Japanese). ♦ April 2 at 12:30 and April 3 at 9: "Primo Amore" (2004, Matteo Garrone; in Italian). ♦ April 2 at 6 and April 3 at noon: "Agnes and His Brothers" (2004, Oskar Roehler; in German). ♦ April 2 at 9:15: "Young Rebels" (2005, Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

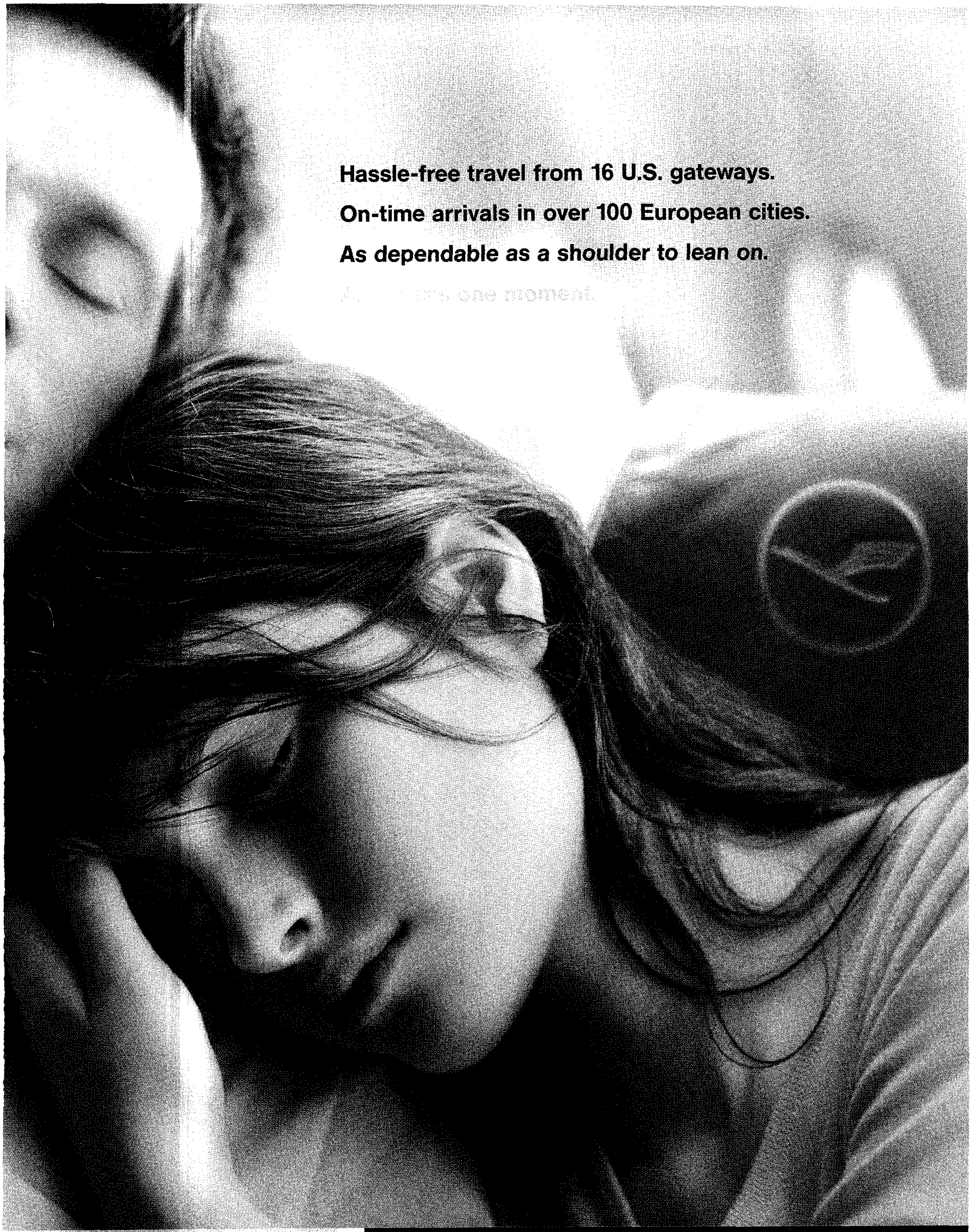
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. April 1-2: "The Fisher King" (1991, Terry Gilliam).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Reel Rhythms: Music from the Islamic World." April 3 at 2 and April 5 at 8:30: "The Voice of Iran: Mohammad Reza Shajarian" (2002, Christian Braad Thomsen). ♦ April 3 at 4:15: "Googoosh: Iran's Daughter" (2000, Farhad Zamani; in English and Farsi). ♦ April 5 at 7: "Nusrat: A Voice from Heaven" (2000, Giuseppe Asaro).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through April 3: "New Directors/New Films" (see listing above). ♦ Through April 7: "New Faces of Swedish Cinema; Spotlight on Lukas Moodysson." All films are in Swedish. April 1 at 2 and 6:30 and April 3 at 2: "Dalecarlians" (2004, Maria Blom). ♦ April 1 at 4:15 and 8:45: "Kops" (2003, Josef Fares). ♦ April 2 at 2 and April 5 at 9:20: "Lilya 4-Ever" (2002, Moodysson). ♦ April 2 at 6:45 and April 3 at 8:40: "A Hole in My Heart" (2004, Moodysson). ♦ April 2 at 9:10 and April 4 at 4 and 8:15: "Illusive Tracks" (2003, Peter Dalle). ♦ April 3 at 4:15 and April 5 at 4:15: "Love & Happiness" (2005, Kristina Humle). ♦ April 3 at 6:30: "Fourteen Sucks" (2005, Filippa Freijd, Martin Jern, Henrik Norrthon, and Emil Larsson). ♦ April 4 at 2 and 6:15: "Show Me Love" (1998, Moodysson). ♦ April 5 at 2: "Together" (2000, Moodysson).



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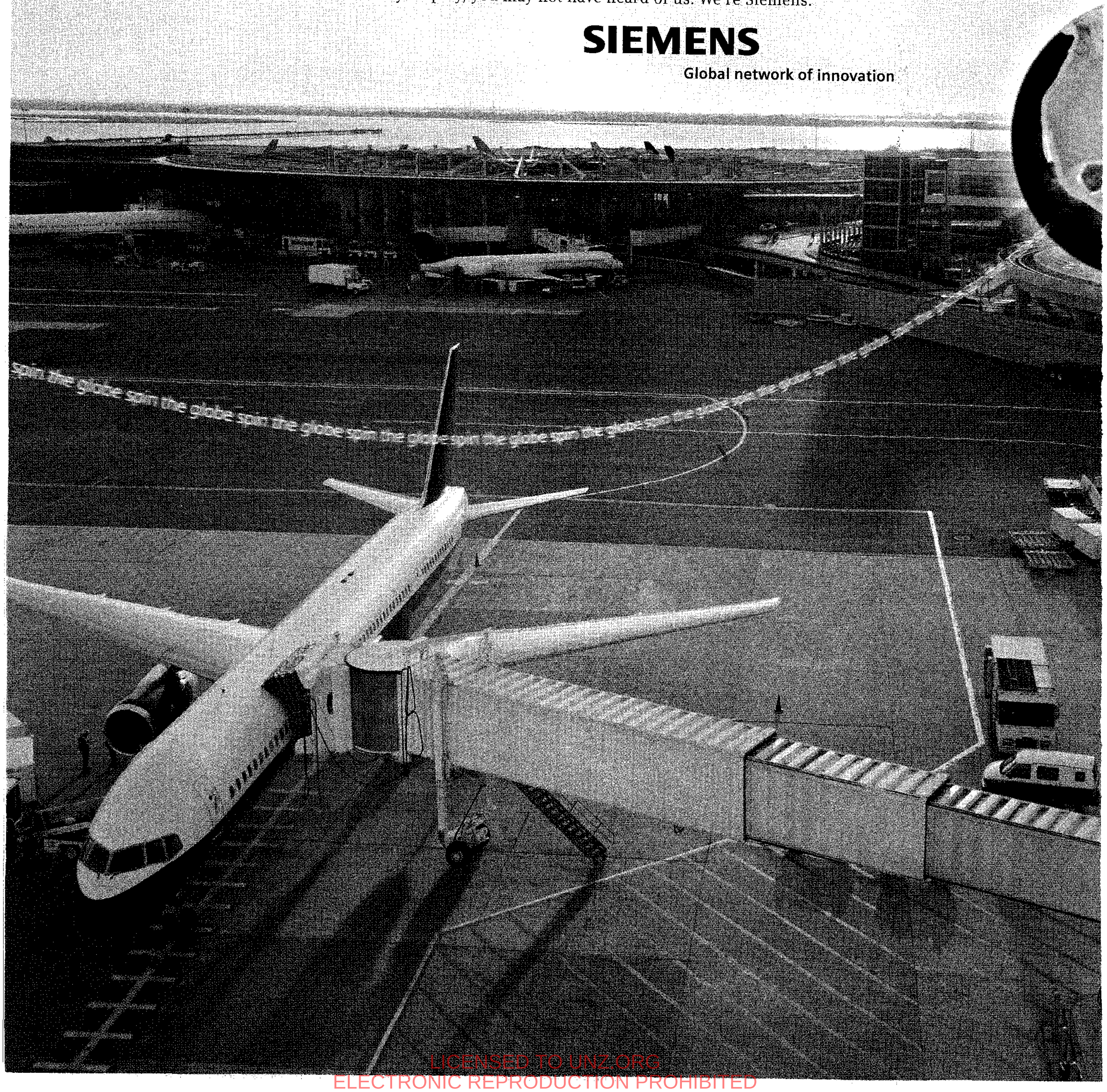
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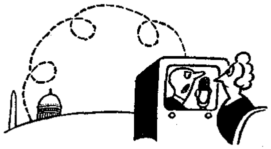
THE
NEW YORKER

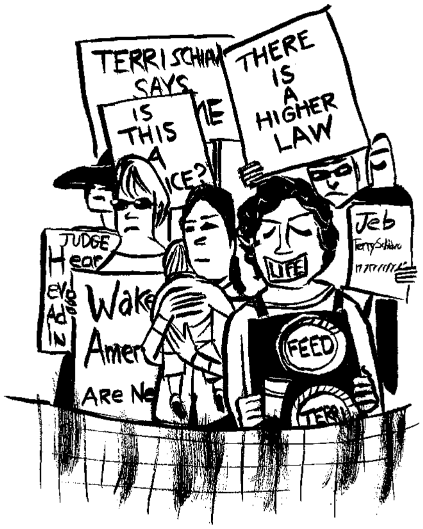
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MATTERS OF LIFE



Last week, Theresa Marie Schindler Schiavo, known to cable-news viewers and talk-radio listeners as Terri, was as ubiquitous as Elián González and Laci Peterson once were. Yet she was also hidden, obscured behind layers of political and religious posturing, legal maneuvering, emotional projection, and media exploitation that swaddled her like strips of linen around a mummy.

Terri Schiavo was born on December 3, 1963, near Philadelphia, the first of three children of Robert and Mary Schindler. As a teen-ager, she was obese—at eighteen, she weighed two hundred and fifty pounds—but with diligence she lost a hundred pounds, and by the time she married Michael Schiavo, in 1984, she was an attractive and vivacious young woman. By the end of the decade, she had moved with her husband to Florida, was undergoing fertility treatments, and had slimmed down further, to a hundred and ten pounds. On February 25, 1990, Terri suffered cardiac arrest, leading to severe brain damage. The cause was a drastically reduced level of potassium in her bloodstream, a condition frequently associated with bulimia. Her death that day was forestalled by heroic measures, including a tracheotomy and ventilation. But when, after a few weeks, she emerged from a coma, it was only to enter a "persistent vegetative state," with no evidence or hope of improvement—a diagnosis that, in the fifteen years since, has been confirmed, with something close to unanimity, by many neurologists on many occasions on behalf of many courts. The principal internal organs of Terri's body, including her brain stem, which controls such involuntary actions as heartbeat, digestion, respiration, and the bodily sleep cycle, continued to function as long as liquid nourishment was provided through a tube threaded into her stomach through a hole in her abdomen. The exception was her cerebral cortex, which is the seat of language, of the processing of sense impressions, of thought, of awareness of one's surroundings and one's inner state—in short, of consciousness. Her EKG flatlined. The body lived; the mind died. "At this point," the Florida Supreme Court wrote six months ago, "much of her cerebral cortex is simply gone and has been replaced by cerebral spinal fluid. Medicine cannot cure this condition. Unless an act of God, a true miracle, were to recreate her brain, Theresa will always remain in an unconscious, reflexive state."



Terri Schiavo's life, as distinct from the life of her unsentient organs, ended fifteen years ago. But that did not prevent her from becoming the star of an unusually morbid kind of reality TV show. The show was made possible by two factors. The first was a bitter struggle between Terri's husband, Michael Schiavo, who wanted to allow her body to die in accordance with what he said, and what an unbroken series of court decisions has affirmed, was her own expressed wish, and her parents and siblings, who wanted to keep her body alive at all costs. The second factor was a set of video snippets, provided by the Schindler family and broadcast incessantly by the three cable news networks—CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC—which are themselves entangled in a desperate struggle for dominance. Sometimes the snippets are identified by the year of their taping (2001 and 2002); sometimes they are not. Sometimes they are accompanied by inflammatory captions (FIGHTING FOR HER LIFE); sometimes the captions are merely dramatic (SCHIAVO SAGA). They show Terri's blinking eyes seeming to follow a balloon waved

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

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THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

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in front of her; or her mouth agape in a rictus that could be interpreted as a smile; or her face turned toward her mother's, with her head thrown back, Pietà-like. As neurologists who have examined her have explained, the snippets are profoundly misleading. A few seconds of maximum suggestiveness culled from many hours of tape, they are more in the nature of special effects than of a documentary record. Without them, there would have been no show—and, most likely, no televised vigils outside her hospice, no cries of "murder" from Tom DeLay, the egregious House Majority Leader; no midnight special sessions of the House and Senate; no calling Dr. Frist for a snap video diagnosis; no visuals of President Bush returning from Texas to land on the White House south lawn, striding dramatically across the grass as if it were the deck of an aircraft carrier.

To read through the documents generated by the years of legal wrangling over Terri Schiavo is to be impressed by the thoroughness and conscientiousness with which the courts, especially the Florida courts, approached her case. On legal, substantive, and constitutional grounds, they seemed to have reason and justice on their side. Yet it was a cold sort of reason and justice. On a human level, it was hard to see what concrete harm there could be in indulging her family's desire to keep her body alive, its care presumably underwritten by the hospice and the family's supporters.

Meanwhile, the language of the debate over her fate, pitting a "right to die" against a "right to life," turned rancid in its abstraction. Terri Schiavo, the person, had no further use for a right to die, because Terri Schiavo, the person, had long since exercised that right. Did it really matter if she had told her husband, when she was young and healthy, that she would not wish to live "that way"? Her body notwithstanding, she was not living "that way," or any other way. By the same token, she had no use for a right to life, because her ability to benefit from such a right had long ago been rendered as moot as the legal pleadings on her alleged behalf would soon become.

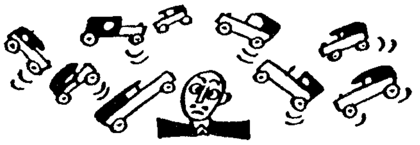
As the week progressed, it was harder and harder to deny that the fervor of Terri's Christianist "supporters" was motivated by dogmas unrelated to her or her rights. If she truly had a "right to life," if removing her feeding tube was truly tantamount to murder, then neither the disapproval nor the approval of her family (or anyone else) could make the slightest moral difference. If her parents had agreed with her husband that the tube should be removed, would their acquiescence have somehow transubstantiated murder into mercy? And, with or without their acquiescence, if Michael Schiavo had spent the last ten years adhering strictly to the orthodox code of family values—if he had remained faithfully celibate, if he had not taken a mistress and had children with her—then might not some of those now accusing him of murder be demanding that his Biblically ordained husbandly authority be respected?

Terri Schiavo has become a metaphor in the religio-cultural struggle over abortion. This—along with the advantages of demonizing the judiciary in preparation for the coming battle over Supreme Court nominees—explains the eagerness of Republican politicians to embrace her parents' cause. Her lack of awareness actually increased her metaphoric usefulness. Like a sixty-four-cell blastocyst, she was without consciousness. Unlike the blastocyst, she was without potential. If letting her body die is murder, goes the logic, then thwarting the development of the blastocyst can surely be nothing less.

Last weekend, as Good Friday gave way to Holy Saturday and Holy Saturday to Easter Sunday, Florida's made-for-TV passion play neared its climax. The death of Terri Schiavo's body will only enhance her symbolic value, elevating her to her destined place as another martyr in this dismal age of martyrs.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
ROUND-TRIP

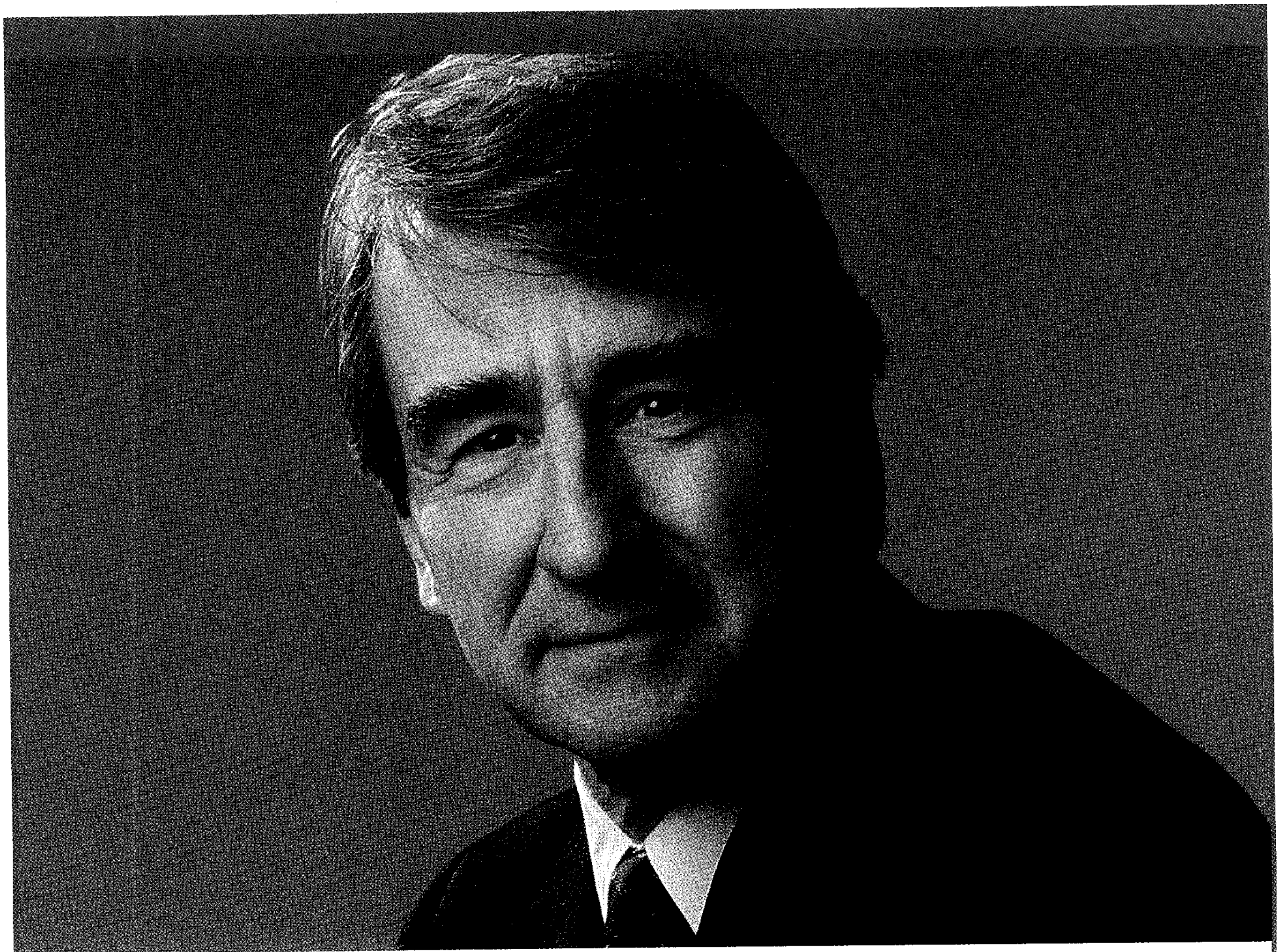


It's one thing to get stuck in traffic, and another to seek it out. The mind, accustomed to devoting all its powers to avoiding traffic jams, bucks at the prospect of being stuck in one on purpose.

So a slight adjustment was called for last week, when the Ford Motor Company staged a race, of sorts, on the major arteries leading into Manhattan, for the purpose of determining which route was most congested during the morning commute. A round of voting on the Web had narrowed down the candidates from thirty to a very worthy five: I-78 in New Jersey, approaching the Holland Tunnel; the Long Island Expressway, leading to the Queens Midtown Tunnel; I-95 North, approaching the George Washington Bridge; plus one sticky patch each from the Connecticut Turnpike and the Hutchinson River Parkway. Ford dispatched a manned Escape Hybrid S.U.V. to each one, with orders to the drivers to stay in the middle lane and stick at or below the speed limit. The winning route would be the one that was slowest, with style points awarded to the car with the best gas mileage—the purpose of this whole exercise being to bring attention to the fuel efficiency of the Hybrid (it runs on both gas and battery power, and the battery recharges when you hit the brakes).

Traffic

Everyone has his own pet stretch of highway hell, but, among traffic connoisseurs, the early money was on the westbound stretch of the L.I.E., from Exit 25 in, and so it was that at 6:58 A.M. last Tuesday, an L.I.E. partisan, having called shotgun, installed himself in the passenger seat of a Hybrid bound for a traffic jam in Queens. The pickup was at Tavern on the Green, in Central Park. At the wheel, exhibiting a feathery touch



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with the accelerator, was Steve Kroswek, of an event-planning company called Motor City Solutions. In back, exhibiting great enthusiasm for the Hybrid, was Christine Feuell, of Ford. They were both from Detroit.

Almost immediately, on the way to reach the traffic, there was traffic. About this kind of traffic, not much good can be said; the despair of sitting in it does not slacken at the sight, across the median, of the congestion that awaits you going in the other direction, even if that congestion is, strictly speaking, what you're after. Still, Feuell found it heartening. "The fuel economy is optimized by this kind of driving," she said.

It took forty-five minutes to drive the 13.8 miles out to Exit 26, Francis Lewis Boulevard, the turnaround point. Kroswek, two hands unfailingly on the wheel, steered the Hybrid across an overpass and back onto the L.I.E. Now he was heading—or at least pointing—west. The flow of traffic, to everyone's relief, was more or less dead. "We have a good shot at winning this," Feuell said.

"I'm going to sneak in behind this gas-guzzling Escalade," Kroswek said.

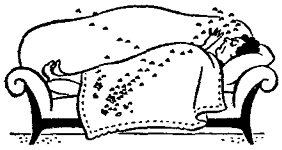
"We can draft off it," Feuell said. "Never underestimate the power of drafting."

The Hybrid inched past Exit 25—Utopia Parkway!—and the race was on. 7:51 A.M. A display on the dash indicated that the car was averaging 42.6 miles per gallon. The speed was about five miles per hour.The windows were beginning to fog up, owing to the fact that Kroswek, to goose the mileage, had decided to forgo air-conditioning or heat. Feuell decided to find out how one of her colleagues was doing, in terms of fuel-economy optimization. On her cell phone she called Sheri Shapiro, who was at that moment creeping along the Connecticut Turnpike. "What are you guys running?" Feuell said. The readout on the dash went from 59.8 to "MAX." "We're on max!" Feuell said. Shapiro was at 34.8.

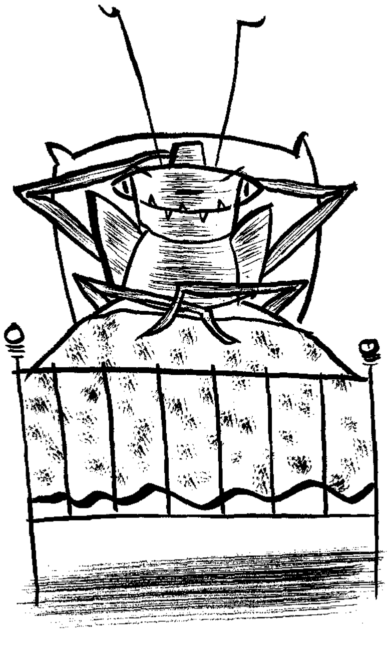
The familiar landmarks drifted by: Queens College, Hydroponic Garden Centers ("Free Advice"), the Unisphere. And then, around Lefrak City, the traffic began to thin, and soon the Hybrid was barrelling at a dismayingly fine clip toward the Manhattan skyline, its miles-per-gallon number dropping fast. Eschewing the E-Z Pass lane, it reached the Midtown Tunnel toll booth, the official finish line on this stretch, at 8:27 A.M.: ten miles in thirty-six minutes. As traffic jams go, this one had been fairly average, only good enough, in fact, to earn the L.I.E. third place, behind the Holland Tunnel and the George Washington Bridge. You had to wonder whether the L.I.E. could do better at night—whether the commute home, as it were, might bring out some of its inherent strengths. Mulligan, anyone? There were no takers.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

DEPT. OF ENTOMOLOGY
NIGHT VISITORS



Life is, like, so unfair sometimes. Case in point: Alexis Swerdloff and her friends Laura Perciasepe, Avni Bhatia, and Anna Arkin-Gallagher, a quartet of eye-on-the-main-chance *nouvelles* Yale graduates who late last summer set up housekeeping in the East Village, in a four-bedroom apartment that they really, *really* liked, but then realized that they liked a lot less when, not long after they moved in, all were viciously assaulted by bedbugs. According to Andy Linares, the proprietor of the Bug Off Pest Control Center, in Washington Heights, which he describes as the largest supplier of pest-control products in the city, New York is witnessing "without a doubt, a dramatic increase in bedbug activity. We hadn't seen bedbugs in New York in sixty years. Then, all of a sudden, bingo. Who'da thunk it?" Whatever satisfaction Alexis and her roommates might have derived from having caught the wave of an interesting new trend was offset by the heart-of-darkness horror of it. That's how they felt, anyway, after the fourth or fifth visit from the exterminator, a redundancy necessitated by the fact that, as Alexis explained the other day, "the bedbugs kept not going away."

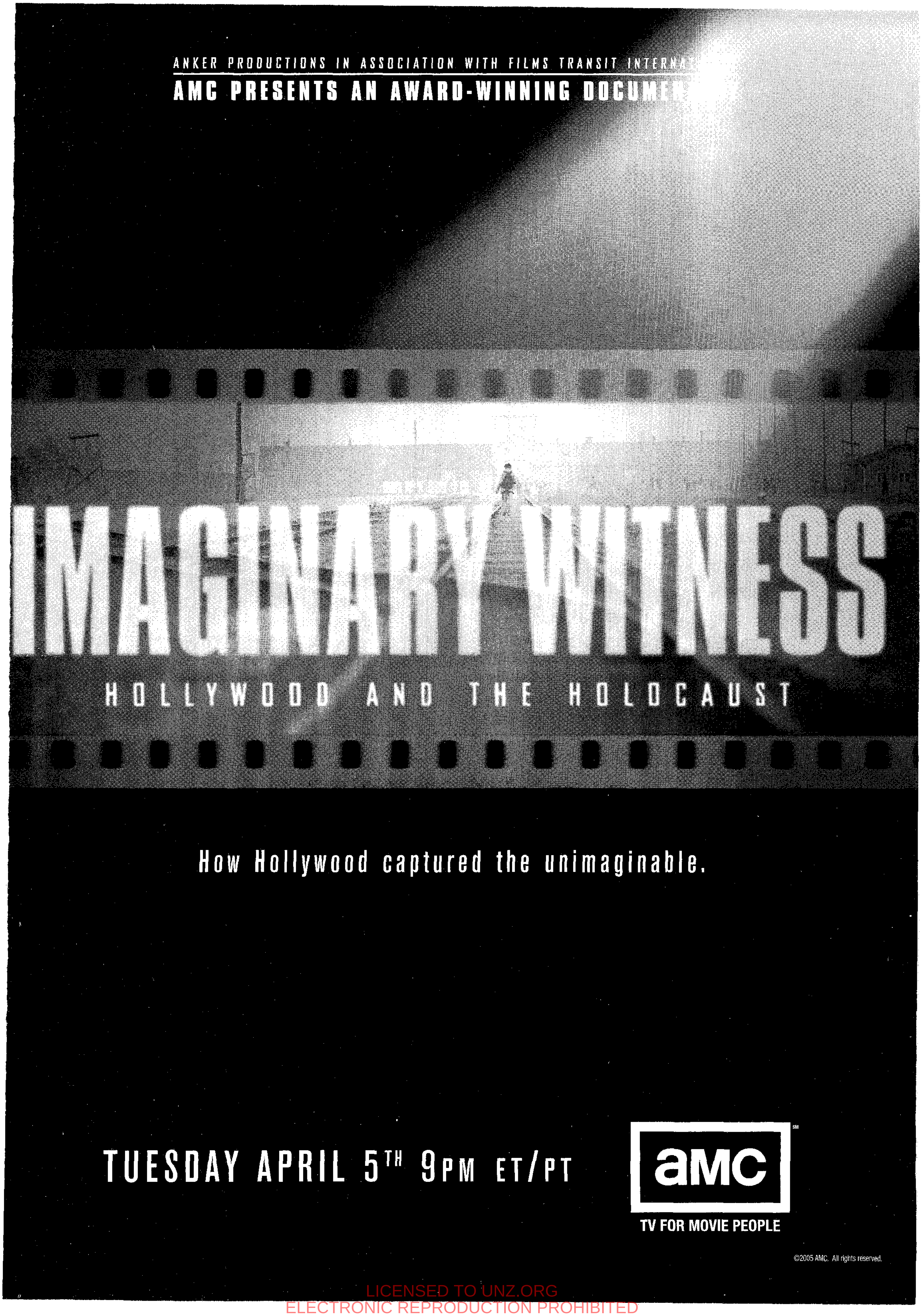


Bedbug

When the first symptoms appeared, last September—small, itchy pink welts, mostly on the arms and legs—the four women thought they had a mosquito problem. A bit of online research established that the welts matched bedbug bites. The good news—other than the illusory good news that the landlord was dispatching an exterminator—was that bedbugs are not a disease vector and therefore not a public-health risk. The bad news, which quickly revealed itself, was that if you're twenty-two years old and you're paying (O.K., so maybe you're getting some help from Mom and Dad) Manhattan rent, bedbugs can easily drive you insane. Cockroach-colored, and when full grown about the size of an apple seed, a bedbug sucks blood through a mosquito-like proboscis after injecting an anesthetic that keeps the sleeping victim from reacting before the meal gets under way. Bedbugs are not, strictly speaking, parasites, because unlike, God forbid, lice or crabs, they can survive away from their host. Basically, they eat and then crawl into a tuft in the mattress or upholstery, or under the rug or the molding, or maybe into your clothes or your furniture, and sleep it off until the next time they're hungry. When they're not feeding or dozing, adult bedbugs evidently enjoy having sex.

The argument can be made that bedbugs are an economic boon—certainly for exterminators, janitorial services, dry cleaners, mattress sellers, and mental-health professionals. Hotel operators tend not to be fond of them.

As it happened, all four roommates



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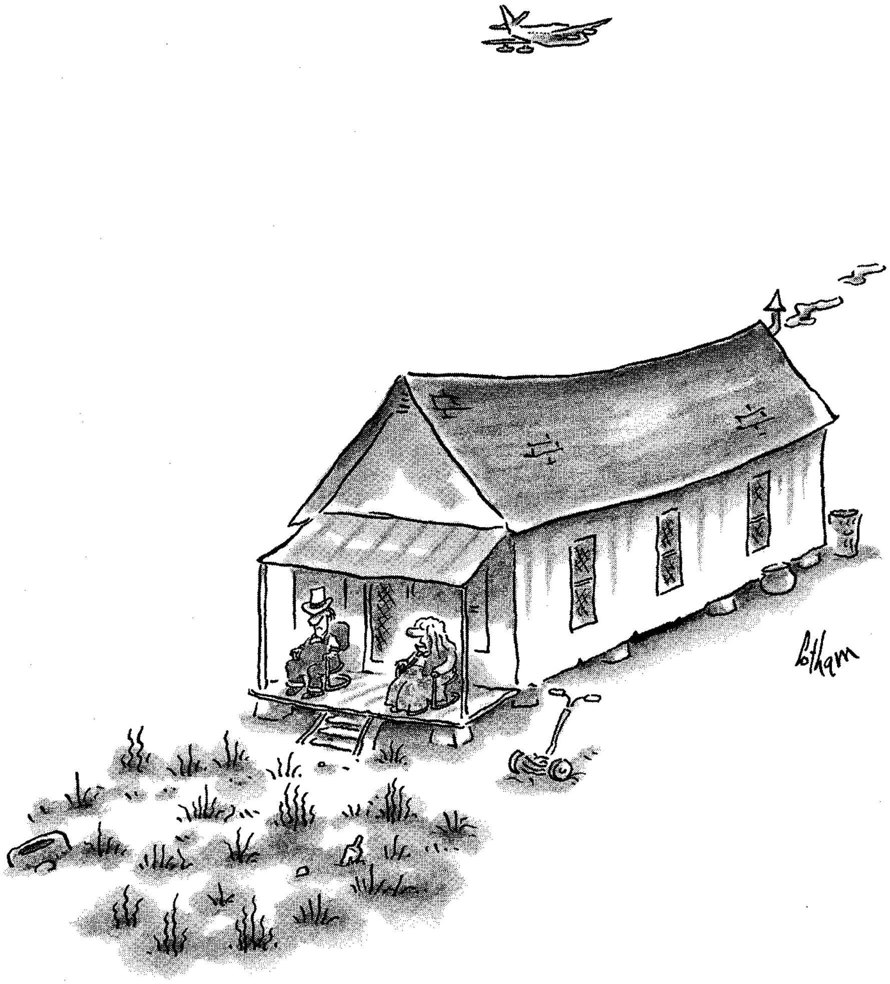


"Perhaps it's a bit early to tell, but I'll bet the Presidential visit changes nothing."

• •

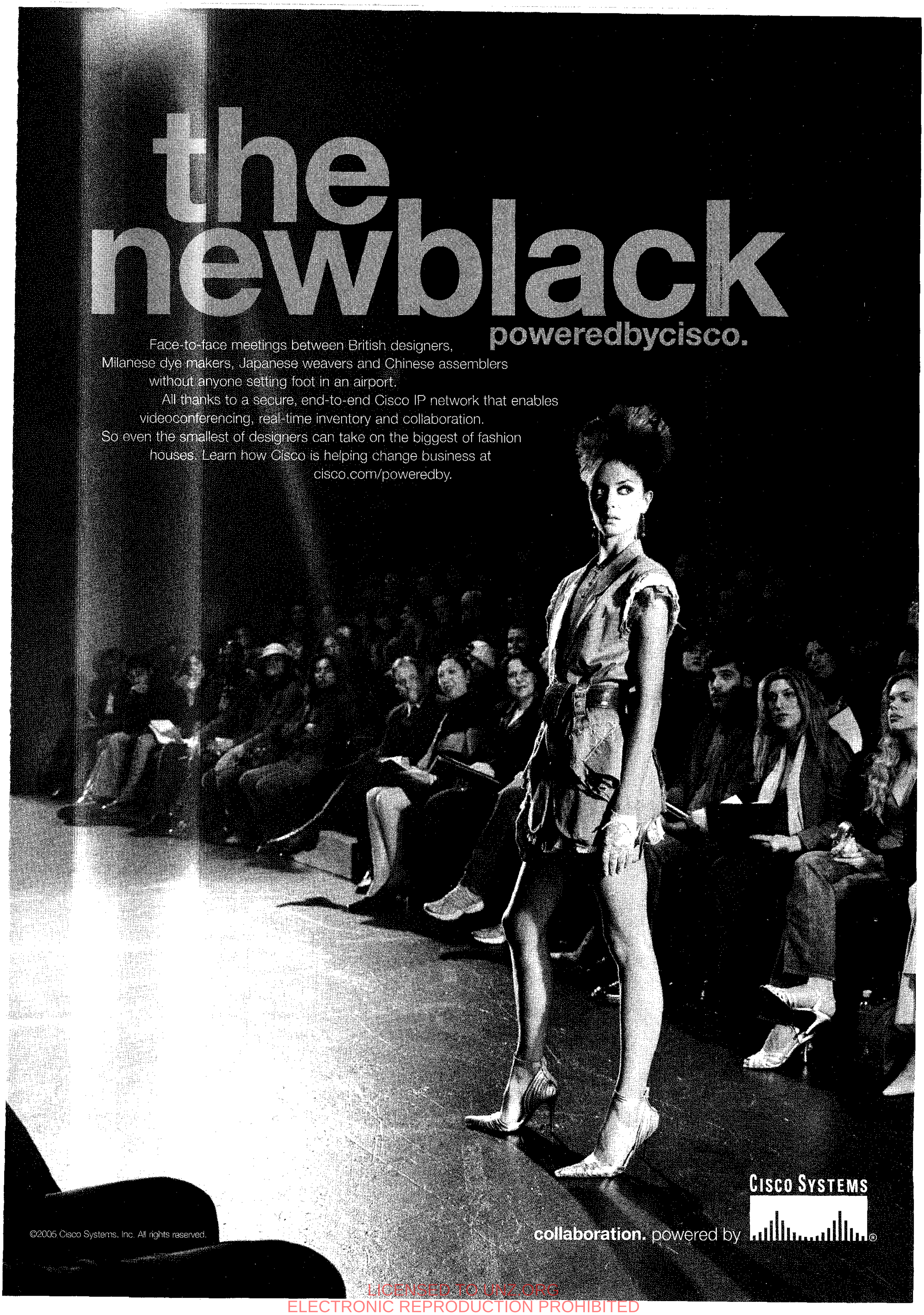
had parents who lived in the city. "So, on days when the exterminator had visited and we couldn't sleep in the apartment, we could all go home to our parents," Alexis said. "But then our parents didn't want to let us in the door. My mother was afraid I would bring them into her apartment and she'd have problems with her co-op board. I'd have to come in the back door and take off all my clothing and put it in a plastic bag in the kitchen. She'd leave a change of clothes for me there, but first she'd make me take a shower."

Around Halloween, Laura Perciasepe, who proved to be particularly sensitive to the bites, raised the possibility of moving. By then, interpersonal friction had begun to fester. "The bedbugs started affecting our relationships," Alexis said. "One of us had a serious boyfriend, and he didn't want to stay over and he didn't want her staying over at his place. No one wanted to be with us. Sort of like leprosy. We were on the verge of killing each other." They reëstablished solidarity after a fact-finding visit from the previous tenants, who announced that they were suing the landlord over their bedbug problem. The roommates considered starting a bedbug Web log, then discovered that one already existed, the handiwork of a young woman, a recovering bedbug victim, who seemed to have been even more aggrieved than they were. (*"Please bear with me. I need to do this.* Fuck you, you fucking motherfucker! You have been sucking my blood and irritating my skin for fucking *months* now! I fucking hate you! You crawl into my bed, into my shirt, up my pants, and fucking *bite me!* . . . Prepare to meet your maker, motherfucker! The Exterminator is *finally* coming, oh yes, he is coming!")

The low point (and turning point) occurred one December evening when Laura—who'd been having trouble sleeping because whenever she lay in bed she found herself imagining that bugs were crawling on her, which, of course, they often were—was trying to convince Alexis that they had to find a different place to live. During a conversation in Alexis's bedroom, Laura started to cry, then noticed a bedbug on her foot and began crying quite a bit louder. Conveniently, they knew a real-estate developer who was willing to help them negotiate with the landlord to break their lease. The deal that they worked out called for the landlord to refund their security deposit and pay them seven hundred dollars apiece as compensation for their dry-cleaning expenditures and the loss of consortium with their furniture, almost all of which they deaccessioned before moving, literally in the middle of the night. After placing their belongings on the curb, the women attached Post-it notes warning scavengers, "May contain bedbugs. Take at your own risk!," and were appalled when all of it disappeared before the sanitation trucks arrived. Laura, who works in publishing, got rid of most of her clothes but insisted on salvaging her books. ("The exterminator warned me not to, but I couldn't help it. I put them in the bathtub, shook them out, vacuumed them one by one, sprayed them with this insect repellent that you're only supposed to put on if you're going to South America, and shook them out again. Someone suggested microwaving them. I tried that with one paperback, but it melted the binding.")

Meanwhile, up in Washington Heights, Andy Linares, of Bug Off, is ensconced in a storefront on St. Nicholas Avenue, in a state of acute readiness. A former classical-music d.j. turned pest-control professional, Linares announced, one rainy day last week, that Bug Off had become "bedbug central." Happily surrounded by deadly materials, he said, "I just got off the phone with three bedbug calls in a row. One from Jersey, one from Queens, one from the Bronx. Plus, I've had a couple of walk-ins." The phone rang. "Let's see if this is number four."

Indeed it was. "Don't panic," he said into the phone. "Do exactly what I'm



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telling you. Target the hot spots. Silicone in the cracks. Seal 'em up. The key is, if you're not bitten you're in good shape. Be vigilant, but live your life, for God's sake. I'm getting the feeling that you just might want Mr. Sanchez in there again to do a follow-up inspection. If that's gonna make you happy and rest better, I'm happy to accommodate you."

After hanging up, Linares said, "I'm also a psychiatrist and a social worker. This was a guy who's absolutely obsessive about it. He hasn't had a problem in six months, and he calls me once a week."

So, what's the reality and what's the prognosis?

"It's an emerging crisis," he said. "So you have to have a plan of attack to reverse the trend. I have the sense that this year—2005—is going to be a determining year. This summer, we're going to hit a plateau. You look at the number of complaints, the number of professionals reaching out to me for the training. I think after this year it will probably stabilize. What we'll end up with is a continuing battle in certain enclaves. Bedbug eradication is not for every pest-control professional, because it does require a great deal of skill, patience, and attention to detail. And it requires that you charge an above-average fee. It's still not up there with roaches and rodents—in New York, that'll always be the bread and butter—but bedbugs is a nice niche."

—*Mark Singer*

MOSCOW POSTCARD
A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

Last week, the political talk in Moscow was mainly about yet another popular revolution, in yet another corner of the old Soviet imperium. First Georgia, then Ukraine, and now the Central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan, where the fallen autocrat abandoned his palace just ahead of the demonstrators seizing his rooms. What could Vladimir Putin be thinking, people asked, as he read his intelligence reports?

The cultural challenge to authority in Russia these days, however, bears no resemblance to what Putin and the older generations recall from the long-ago days of dissidents and general secretaries. The rumblings are of a distinctly postmodern sort. On Wednesday, at the still stately Bolshoi Theatre, a group of young pro-Putin demonstrators called Moving Together rallied in the snow and the slush to protest the première of an opera called "Rosenthal's Children" and, in particular, its notorious librettist, the novelist Vladimir Sorokin.

In 2002, the government, prompted by Moving Together activists, initiated a criminal case against Sorokin under Article 242 of the Russian criminal code: "illegal distribution of pornographic materials and objects" was the charge. The main object of the government's prim outrage was a 1999 novel called "Blue Lard," a phantasmagorical futurist thriller that mocks the Russian Orthodox Church, imagines a New Russian lingo filled with Chinese terminology, and features the spectacle of the clone of Nikita Khrushchev sodomizing the clone of Joseph Stalin—rebellious, but less in the mode of Solzhenitsyn than of Arthur C. Clarke meets the Marquis de Sade. Sorokin, who is nearing fifty, is an indefatigable explorer of the verbal and the carnal. He writes in the key of disgust. In an earlier novel, "The Norm," he depicted the humiliations of Soviet life with a metaphor that's one part Pasolini and one part "Pink Flamingos": sooner or later, all of his characters are forced to eat "the norm," a ration of what is unmistakably human feces. In early street protests against Sorokin, Moving Together activists constructed an enormous cardboard toilet and encouraged people to throw excerpts of his work into it.

With such a history behind him, Sorokin's new opera, with music by Leonid Desyatnikov, was not likely to be another "Così Fan Tutte."

Outside the Bolshoi, just before the seven o'clock curtain, the demonstrators chanted against "Sorokin, the feces-eater" and handed out leaflets entitled "The Artistic Credo of a Pornographer and Feces-Eater." Across the square, a rival group, called the Avant-Garde of Red Youth, carried homemade signs that read "Death to Putin's Lackeys." It has never been clear who or what is behind the Moving Together campaign against Sorokin, but the over-all mood of cultural conservatism, a kind of Sovietism Lite, is a familiar theme in Putin's own rhetoric.

Peering at the protesters, the ticket holders for the première poured through the doors of the Bolshoi. They were the Moscow beau monde—socialites draped in Milan's finest, artists, businesspeople, music lovers eager for something new. The theatre was sold out.

"Rosenthal's Children," as it turned out, was musically unadventurous, but for the Bolshoi—which, until recently, has been a distinctly conservative house—it was a radical departure. The opera tells the story of a German scientist named Rosenthal who invents cloning. The Nazis reject him, and he emigrates to the Soviet Union, where the leadership instructs him to "double the masses," although what he really wants to do is double the world's geniuses. Secretly, Rosenthal clones new versions of Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Verdi, Wagner, and Mozart. (The music, meanwhile, takes themes from all five.) Cut to the early nineteen-nineties: Boris Yeltsin announces that the state can no longer support the five musical clones, and they are forced to beg on the Moscow streets, where they struggle alongside prostitutes, mobsters, and the homeless. "Daddy, buy me a scooter," Wagner sings as he drops dead. Whatever. Only Mozart survives. In his closing aria, he is filled with anguish and loneliness.

As the show ended, one man loudly chanted, "Nonsense! Nonsense!," but he was drowned out by applause and repeated curtain calls. Two days later, one critic, in the liberal daily *Kommersant*, wrote that "Rosenthal's Children" was Sorokin's "least offensive" work.

In the distant past, Sorokin might have suffered imprisonment, or worse; now the protests of Kremlin supporters seem to have made him more popular. But the cultural conservatives in Moscow will not be deterred: a group of Russian Orthodox activists have been picketing a new ballet called "Rasputin." They are offended by the idea of a dancing tsar, of Nicholas II in ballet tights. The Tsar's family, after all, has just been canonized.

—*Masha Lipman*

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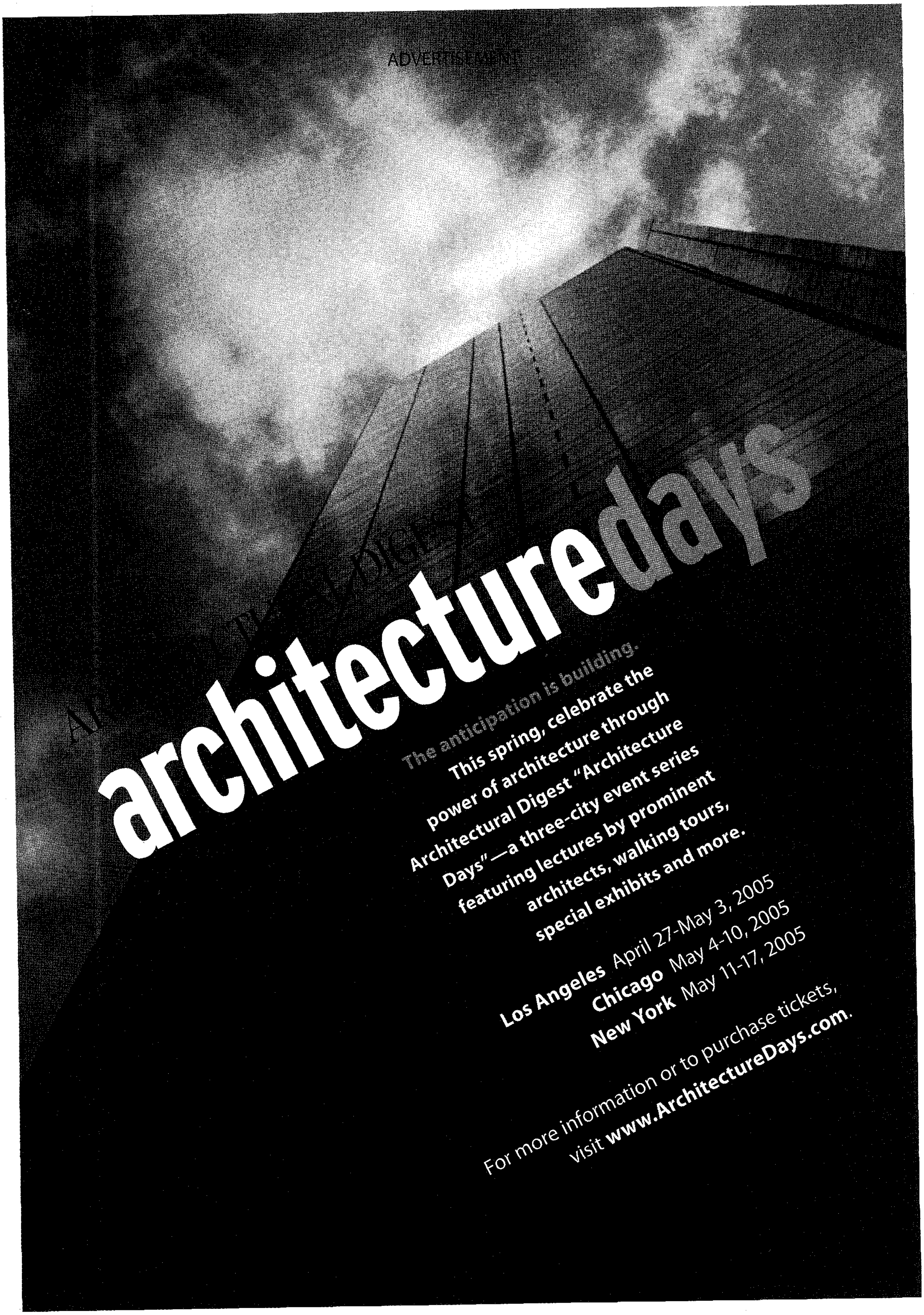

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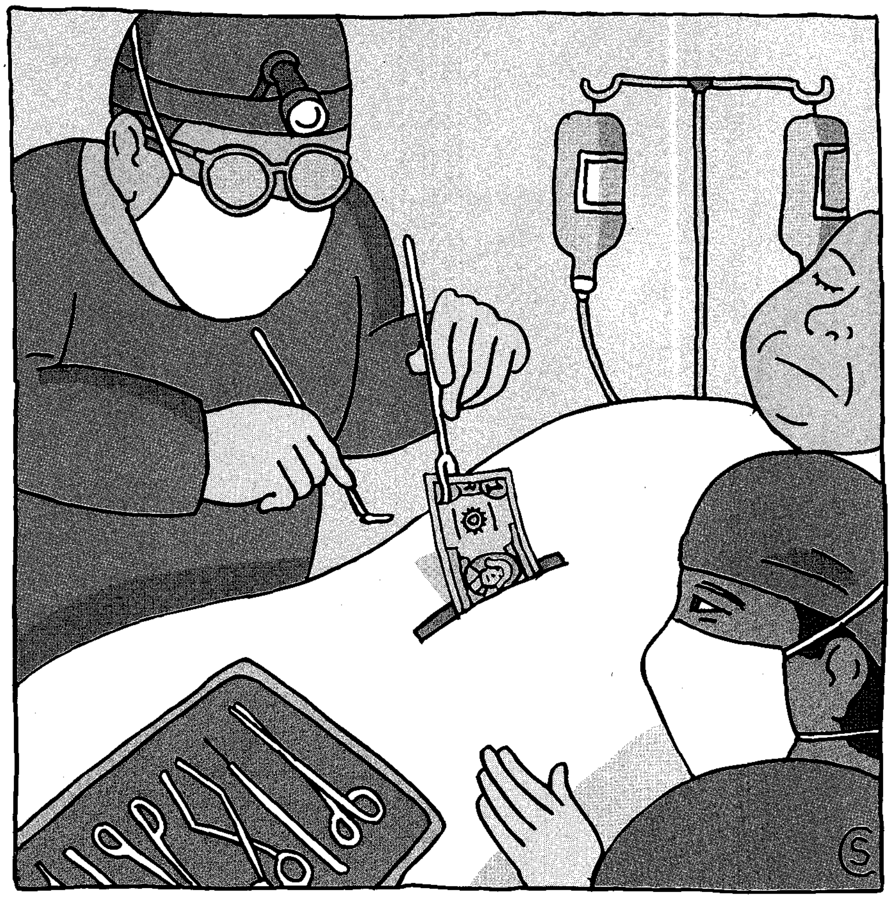
MEDICAL DISPATCH

PIECEWORK

Medicine's money problem.

BY ATUL GAWANDE

To become a doctor, you spend so much time in the tunnels of preparation—head down, trying not to screw up, trying to make it from one day to the next—that it is a shock to find yourself at the other end, with someone shaking your hand and asking how much money you want to make. But the day comes. Two years ago, I was finishing my eighth and final year as a resident in surgery. I had got a second interview for a surgical staff position at the Brigham and Women's Hospital, in Boston, where I had trained. It was a great job—I'd get to specialize in surgery for certain tumors that interested me, but I'd also be able to do some general surgery. On the appointed day, I put on my fancy suit and took a seat in the wood-panelled office of the chairman of surgery. He sat down opposite me and then he told me the job was mine. "Do you want it?" Yes, I said, a little startled. The job, he explained, came with a guaranteed salary for three years. After that, I would be on my own: I'd make what I brought in from my patients and would pay my own expenses. So, he went on, how much should we pay you?



Your income as a doctor is determined mainly by your business, not medical, prowess.

SEYMOUR CHWAST

After all those years of being told how much I would either pay (about forty thousand dollars a year for medical school) or get paid (about forty thousand dollars a year in residency), I was stumped. "How much do the surgeons usually make?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Look," he said, "you tell me what you think is an appropriate income to start with until you're on your own, and if it's reasonable that's what we'll pay you." He gave me a few days to think about it.

Most people gauge what they should be paid by what others are paid for doing the same work, so I tried asking various members of the surgical staff. These turned out to be awkward conversations. I'd pose my little question, and they'd start mumbling as if their mouths were full of crackers. I tried all kinds of formulations. Maybe they could tell me how much take-home pay would be if one did, say, eight major operations a week? Or how much they thought I should ask for? Nobody would give me a number.

Most people are squeamish about saying how much they earn, but in medicine the situation seems especially fraught. Doctors aren't supposed to be in it for the money, and the more concerned a doctor seems to be about making money the more suspicious people become about the care being provided. (That's why the good doctors on TV hospital dramas drive old cars and live in ramshackle apartments, while the bad doctors wear bespoke suits.) During our hundred-hour-week, just-over-minimum-wage residencies, we all take a self-righteous pleasure in hinting to people about how hard we work and how little we earn. Settled into practice a few years later, doctors clam up. Since the early nineteen-eighties, public surveys have indicated that two-thirds of Americans believe that doctors are "too interested in making money." Yet the health-care system, as I soon discovered, requires doctors to give inordinate attention to matters of payment and expenses.

To get a sense of the numbers involved, I asked our physician group's billing office for a copy of its "master fee schedule," which lists what various insurers pay staff doctors for the care they provide. It has twenty-four columns across the top, one for each of the major insurance plans, and, running down the side, a row for every service a doctor can bill for. Our current version goes on for more than six hundred pages. Everything's in there, with a dollar amount attached. For those who have Medicare—its payments are near the middle of the range—an office visit for a new patient with a "low

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complexity" problem (service No. 99203) pays $77.29. A visit for a "high complexity" problem (service No. 99205) pays $151.92. Setting a dislocated shoulder (service No. 23650) pays $275.70. Removing a bunion: $492.35. Removing an appendix: $621.31. Removing a lung: $1,662.34. The best-paid service on the list? Surgical reconstruction for a baby born without a diaphragm: $5,366.98. The lowest-paying? Trimming a patient's nails ("any number"): $10.15. The hospital collects separately for any costs it incurs.

The notion of a schedule like this, with services and fees laid out à la carte like a menu from Chili's, may seem odd. In fact, it's rooted in ancient history. Doctors have been paid on a piecework basis since at least the Code of Hammurabi; in Babylon during the eighteenth century B.C., a surgeon got ten shekels for any lifesaving operation he performed (only two shekels if the patient was a slave). The standardized fee schedule, though, is a thoroughly modern development. In the late nineteen-eighties, insurers, both public and private, began to agitate for a more "rational" schedule of physician payments. For decades, they had been paying physicians according to what were called "usual, customary, and reasonable fees." This was more or less whatever doctors decided to charge. Not surprisingly, some of the charges began to rise considerably. There were some egregious distortions. For instance, cataract-surgery fees (which could reach six thousand dollars in 1985) had been set when the operation typically took two to three hours. When new technologies allowed ophthalmologists to do these operations in thirty minutes, the fees didn't change. Billings for this one operation grew to consume four per cent of Medicare's budget. In general, payments for doing procedures had far outstripped payments for diagnoses. In the mid-eighties, doctors who spent an hour making a complex and lifesaving diagnosis were paid forty dollars; for spending an hour doing a colonoscopy and excising a polyp, they received more than six hundred dollars.

This was, the federal government decided, unacceptable. The system discouraged good primary care, and distorted specialty care. So the government determined that payments ought to be commensurate with the amount of work involved. The principle was simple and sensible; putting it into practice was another matter. In 1985, William Hsiao, a Harvard economist, was commissioned to measure the exact work involved in each of the tasks doctors perform. It must have seemed a quixotic assignment, something like being asked to measure the exact amount of anger in the world. But Hsiao came up with a formula. Work, he decided, was a function of time spent, mental effort and judgment, technical skill and physical effort, and stress. He put together a large team that interviewed and surveyed thousands of physicians from almost two dozen specialties. They analyzed what was involved in everything from forty-five minutes of psychotherapy for a patient with panic attacks to a hysterectomy for a woman with cervical cancer.

They determined that the hysterectomy takes about twice as much time as the session of psychotherapy, 3.8 times as much mental effort, 4.47 times as much technical skill and physical effort, and 4.24 times as much risk. The total calculation: 4.99 times as much work. Estimates and extrapolations were made in this way for thousands of services. (Cataract surgery was estimated to involve slightly less work than a hysterectomy.) Overhead and training costs were factored in. Eventually, Hsiao and his team arrived at a relative value for every single thing doctors do. Some specialists were outraged by particular estimates. But Congress set a multiplier to convert the relative values into dollars, the new fee schedule was signed into law, and in 1992 Medicare started paying doctors accordingly. Private insurers followed shortly thereafter (although they applied somewhat different multipliers, depending on the deals they struck with local physicians).

There is a certain arbitrariness to the result. Who can really say whether a hysterectomy is more labor-intensive than cataract surgery? A subsequent commission has reëxamined and recalibrated the relative values for more than six thousand different services. Such toil will no doubt continue in perpetuity. But the system has been accepted—more or less.

Even with the fee schedule in front of me, I had a hard time figuring out how much I'd earn. My practice would primarily involve office visits, some general surgery (appendectomies, gallbladder removals, bowel and breast surgery), and—given my interest in endocrine tumors—a lot of thyroid and adrenal surgery. Each of these procedures pays between six hundred and eleven hundred dollars, and I could expect to do eight or so a week. Multiplying the numbers by forty-eight workweeks in a year, it seemed that I could make a flabbergasting half-million dollars a year. But then I'd have to spend thirty-one thousand dollars a year on malpractice insurance, and eighty thousand dollars a year to rent office and clinic space. I'd have to buy computers and other office equipment, and hire a secretary and a medical assistant or a nurse. The department of surgery deducts 19.5 per cent for its overhead. Then, there's the five to ten per cent of patients who get free care because they

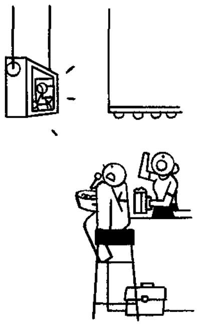
"*Whoa! I was just playing dead.*"

don't have insurance. And, even when patients are insured, some pay far less than others. Studies also indicate that insurers find a reason to reject up to thirty per cent of the bills they receive.

Roberta Parillo is a financial-disaster specialist for doctors who is called by physician groups or hospitals when they suddenly find that they can't make ends meet. ("I fix messes" was the way she put it to me.) At the time I spoke to her, she was in Pennsylvania, trying to figure out where things had gone wrong for a struggling hospital. In previous months, she'd been in Mississippi, to help a group of a hundred and twenty-five physicians who found they were in debt; Washington, D.C., where a physician group was worried about its survival; and New England, for a big anesthesiology department that had lost fifty million dollars. She'd turned away a dozen other clients. It's quite possible, she told me, for a group of doctors to make nothing at all.

Doctors quickly learn that how much they make has little to do with how good they are. It largely depends on how they handle the business side of their practice. "A patient calls to schedule an appointment, and right there things can fall apart," she said. If patients don't have insurance, you have to see if they qualify for a state assistance program like Medicaid. If they do have insurance, you have to find out whether the insurer lists you as a valid physician. You have to make sure the insurer covers the service the patient is seeing you for and find out the stipulations that are made on that service. You have to make sure the patient has the appropriate referral number from his primary-care physician. You also have to find out if the patient has any outstanding deductibles or a co-payment to make, because patients are supposed to bring the money when they see you. "Patients find this extremely upsetting," Parillo said. " 'I have insurance! Why do I have to pay for anything! I didn't bring any money!' Suddenly, you have to be a financial counsellor. At the same time, you feel terrible telling them not to come in unless they bring cash, check, or credit card. So you see them anyway, and now you're going to lose twenty per cent, which is more than your margin, right off the bat."

Even if all this gets sorted out, there's a further gantlet of mind-numbing insurance requirements. If you're a surgeon, you may need to obtain a separate referral number for the office visit and for any operation you perform. You may need a pre-approval number, too. Afterward, you have to record the referral numbers, the pre-approval number, the insurance-plan number, the diagnosis codes, the procedure codes, the visit codes, your tax I.D. number, and any other information the insurer requires, on the proper billing forms. "If you get anything wrong, no money—rejected," Parillo said. Insurers also have software programs that are designed to reject certain combinations of diagnosis, procedure, and visit codes. Any rejection, and the bill comes back to the patient. Calls to the insurer produce automated menus and interminable holds.



Parillo's recommendations are pretty straightforward. Physicians must computerize their billing systems, she said. They must carefully review the bills they send out and the payments that insurers send back. They must hire office personnel just to deal with the insurance companies. A well-run office can get the insurer's rejection rate down from thirty per cent to, say, fifteen per cent. That's how a doctor makes money, she told me. It's a war with insurance, every step of the way.

When I was going through medical training, a discouraging refrain from older physicians was that they would never have gone into medicine had they known what they know now. A great many of them simply seemed unable to sort through the insurance morass. This was perhaps why a 2004 survey of Massachusetts physicians found that fifty-eight per cent were dissatisfied with the trade-off between their income and the number of hours they were working; fifty-six per cent thought their income was not competitive with what others earn in comparable professions; and forty per cent expected to see their income fall over the next five years.

William Weeks, a Dartmouth professor, has done a number of studies on the work life of physicians. He and his colleagues found that working hours for physicians are indeed longer than for other professions. (In 1998, the typical general surgeon worked sixty-three hours per week.) He also found that, if you view the expense of going to college and professional school as an investment, the payoff is somewhat poorer in medicine than in other professions. Tracking the fortunes of graduates of medical schools, law schools, and business schools with comparable entering grade-point averages, he found that the annual rate of return by the time they reach middle age is sixteen per cent per year in primary-care medicine, eighteen per cent in surgery, twenty-three per cent in law, and twenty-six per cent in business. Not bad, in any of these fields, but the differences are there. A physician's income also tends to peak when he has been in practice between five and ten years, and then decrease in subsequent years as his willingness and ability to work the long hours wane.

All that said, it seems churlish to complain. Here are the facts. In 2003, the median income for primary-care physicians was $156,902. For general surgeons, like me, it was $264,375. In certain specialties, the income can be a good deal higher. Busy orthopedic surgeons, cardiologists, pain specialists, oncologists, neurosurgeons, hand surgeons, and radiologists frequently earn more than half a million dollars a year. Maybe lawyers and businessmen can do better. But then most biochemists, architects, math professors earn less. In the end, are we working for the profits or for the patients? We can count ourselves lucky that we haven't had to choose.

There are, however, those who do choose—and manage to earn considerably more than most. I talked to one such surgeon. He had practiced general surgery at the same East Coast hospital for three decades. He loved his work, he said. He did not have an unduly heavy schedule. His office hours were from nine-thirty to three-thirty on just one day a week. He did about six operations a week. He had been able to develop a special interest and skill in laparoscopy—performing operations through tiny incisions using fine instruments and a fibre-optic video camera. And he no longer had to cover midnight emergencies. I asked him in some roundabout way how much he earned doing this. "Net income?" he said. "About one point two million last year."

I had to catch my breath for a moment. He'd made more than a million dollars every year for at least the past decade. I wondered how it was possible, or even acceptable, to earn so much for doing general surgery. He was perfectly aware of the reaction. (As was his hospital, which did not want his or its name to appear in print for this article.) "I think doctors shortchange themselves," he said. "Doctors are working for fees that are similar to or below plumbers or electricians"—professions that, he noted, don't require a decade of school and training. He doesn't see why doctors should let insurance companies dictate their compensation. So he accepts no insurance. If you decide to see him, you pay cash. If you then want to fight with your insurer for reimbursement, that's up to you.

The fees he charges are what he finds the market will bear. For a laparoscopic cholecystectomy—removal of the gallbladder, one of the most common operations in general surgery—insurers will pay surgeons about seven hundred dollars. He asks for eighty-five hundred dollars. For a gastric fundoplication, an operation to stop severe reflux of stomach acid, insurers pay eleven hundred dollars. He charges twelve thousand dollars. He has had no shortage of patients.

It's not clear how easily others would replicate his success. After all, he works in a large metropolis, where many people have either incomes or insurance policies generous enough to accommodate his fees. He's also something of a star in his field. "I know in my heart that I can do things that other surgeons can't," he told me.

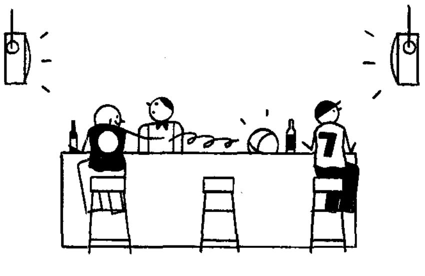
But suppose I did what he did—refused to deal with insurance and charged what the market would bear. I would not make millions, but I could make a lot more than I otherwise would. I'd avoid all the insurance hassles, too. Still, would I want to be a doctor only to those who could afford me?

Why not? the surgeon was asking. "For doctors to think we have to be altruistic is sticking our heads in the sand," he told me. Everyone is squeezing us in order to make money, he said—everyone from the supply companies that we pay to the insurers who are supposed to pay us. "The C.E.O. of Aetna's compensation is now ten million dollars," he pointed out. "These are for-profit companies. Insurance companies make money by withholding reimbursements to physicians or by not approving payment for a service we've provided." To him, the question is why we deal with them at all. In his view, doctors need to understand that we are businessmen—nothing less, nothing more—and the sooner we accept this the better.

His position has a certain bracing clarity. Yet, if this is purely a service-for-money business, if doctoring is no different from doing oil changes, why choose to endure twelve years of medical training, instead of, say, two years of business school? I still believe that doctors remain fundamentally motivated by the hope of doing meaningful and respected work for society. Hence the responsibility most of us feel to take care of people even when their insurers exasperate us, or when they have no insurance at all. If we fail ordinary people, then the notion that we do something special is gone. I can understand wanting to escape the insurance morass. But isn't there some other way around it?

In 1971, a thirty-three-year-old internist named Harris Berman decided to do things a little differently. He and a friend who had just completed his general-surgery training moved back to their home state of New Hampshire, to the town of Nashua. They joined up with a pediatrician, a family practitioner, and an obstetrician. Together they offered health care to patients for a fixed fee, without any bills to insurance companies. It was a radical experiment. They paid themselves fixed salaries of thirty thousand dollars a year, with no differences in income between specialties. They also bought reinsurance coverage to pay for costs that exceeded fifty thousand dollars, as Berman remembers it, in case a patient developed a catastrophic illness.

The scheme worked. Berman, who is now sixty-six years old, told me the tale. They called themselves the Matthew Thornton Health Plan, after a physician who was one of New Hampshire's three signers of the Declaration of Independence. They were essentially an H.M.O., though a very tiny one. Within a short time, about five thousand patients had signed up. The doctors thrived, and there were remarkably few hassles. In the beginning, they didn't have any subspecialists, so when patients were sent to an ophthalmologist or an orthopedist the Thornton doctors had to make an individual payment. Eventually, they asked the specialists to accept a flat fee each month and dispense with the paperwork.



"Some accepted," Berman said. "And the effect on care was remarkable. The urologists, for example, suddenly became interested in having us understand which patients they really needed to see and which ones we could take care of without them. They came down and gave us talks—how to work up patients with blood in the urine and decide which ones you had to worry about. The ophthalmologists came down and told us how to take care of itchy eyes and runny eyes. They weren't going to make more money seeing these unnecessary patients, and they found a way to make sure we became more efficient."

After a few years, the Matthew Thornton Health Plan started to be cheaper than other insurers. Employers caught on and enrollment soared. Berman had to bring in more doctors. That's when things got more complicated. "In the beginning, we were all committed," he said. "We worked hard—long hours, a lot of dedication, young and hungry. Then, as we started to get bigger and bring in more staff, we found that others joined for other reasons. They liked the salaried life style—the idea that being a doc could be a job, rather than a day-and-night commitment. Some were part-timers. We began to see people looking at their watches as five o'clock approached. It became clear that we had a productivity problem." When they tried to bring in specialists to work full time with the group, the specialists refused to accept the same salary as the others. In order to get an orthopedic surgeon to join, Berman had to pay him considerably more than what everyone else got. It was the first of many adjustments he had to make in how

POSTMARK////

New Orleans

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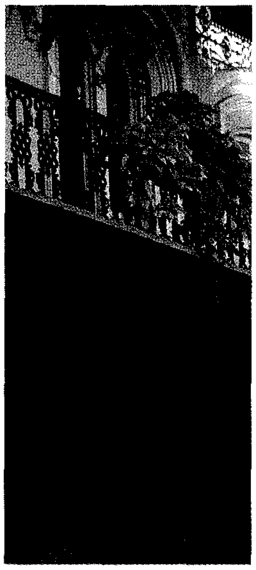
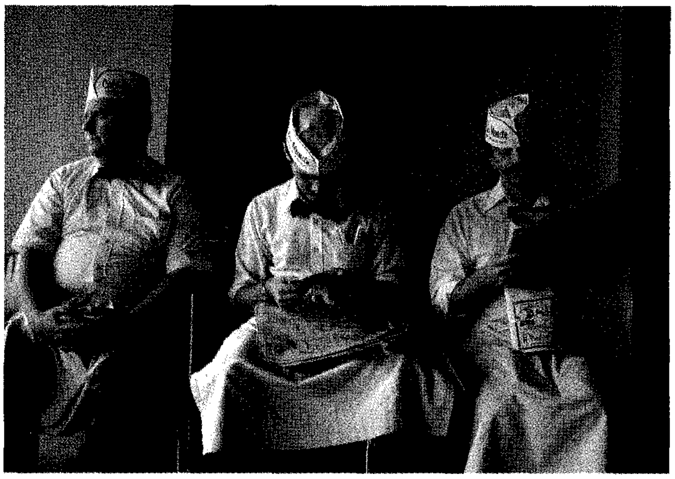
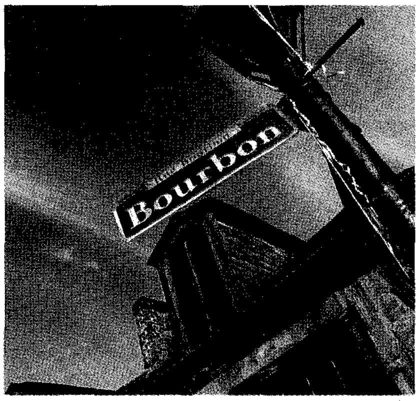
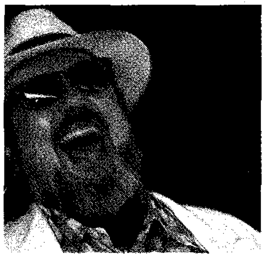
ANDOUILLE BOUDIN TASSO
CRAWFISH
HOT CRAWFISH









Authentically Yours

New Orleans has long been an inspiration to writers. Tennessee Williams, Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Truman Capote, Lillian Hellman, and Walker Percy all lived and worked here. The distinctive Old World neighborhoods and the enveloping bayous of the region provide the perfect setting for any novel and for one of the country's leading writers' conferences.

The annual **New Orleans Writers' Conference** (May 12–13) puts attendees in the heart of the French Quarter, surrounding them in the same sights, sounds, and smells that have captured the imaginations of so many other scribes. The nation's top writers, agents, and publishers, along with aspiring writers comprise a literary gumbo as unforgettable as a meal at Commander's Palace.

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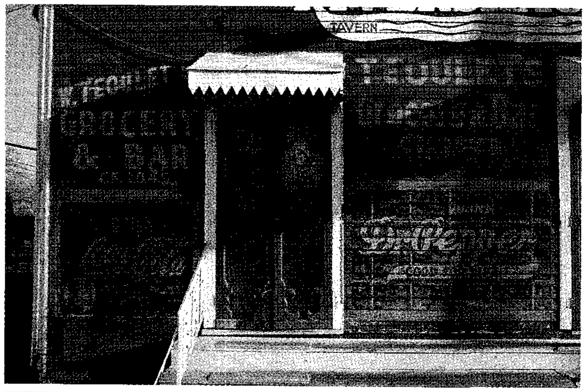
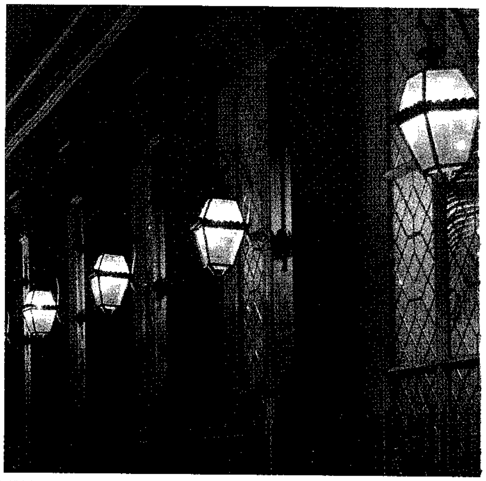
New Orleans





by Ben Sandmel

Insular, quixotic, and pulsing with brazen funk, New Orleans makes most anyplace else seem awfully dull. Its European street names, piquant food, and African-Caribbean folkways suggest a foreign land in a bygone era. A capricious land, far from America's mainstream, where conformists bore while eccentrics succeed. A luxuriant tropical land where logic and pastel houses both fade into dreamy neglect.

This port city's pungent ambience reflects the diverse lot who entered its harbor for centuries. Slaves valiantly maintained the rich traditions of their native West Africa. Cubans and Haitians brought their islands' creolized ethos. Colonists from Spain and France recreated an Old World society and snubbed upriver Anglos as *les Américains*. Irish and Sicilians came en masse in the late-nineteenth century; Asians and Latinos followed.

New Orleans' vibrant cross-pollination of music and literature is the happy result of this multicultural mélange. Storyville, the legendary cradle of jazz, long gone, survives in Sidney Bechet's autobiography, "Treat it Gentle."

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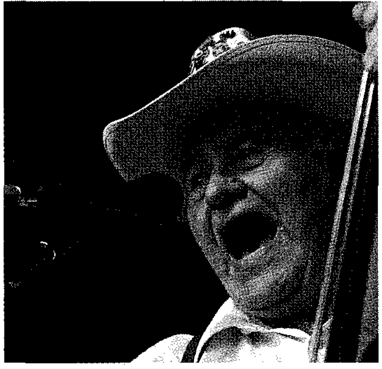
La conversation



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Jazz, continually evolving, resounds in African-American communities such as Tremé. Street vendors' songs, still heard today, infuse the works of Lafcadio Hearn. R. & B. swaggers on the French Quarter streets trod by Mark Twain, A. J. Liebling, Richard Ford, and Andrei Codrescu.

Borne on breezes from the Mississippi, the strains of steamboat calliopes drift to far-flung neighborhoods. To the Esplanade Avenue mansions of Kate Chopin's "The Awakening," and the Gentilly bungalows of Walker Percy's "The Moviegoer." To the fine Uptown gilded cages of Ellen Gilchrist's "In the Land of Dreamy Dreams." To the real-life Prytania Theater, where the fictional Ignatius J. Reilly annoyed patrons in John Kennedy Toole's "A Confederacy of Dunces."

River music resonates by night, too, when foghorns blow yearning blue notes. These mournful tones reverberate on the gritty streets of Nelson Algren's "A Walk on the Wild Side" and in the Central City housing projects of Louis Edwards' "N." Their breathy sighs are heard in the Vietnamese enclaves explored by Robert Olen Butler in "A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain." They waft inside the Mother-in-Law Lounge, where a bizarre statue of singer Ernie K-Doe stands guard against anyone who dares to forget him—including the *New York Times* reporter whom K-Doe once held "hostage" in his club, although all was soon forgiven.

Readers of the *Times* rarely see such scenes. Nor do many visitors. They tend to focus, understandably, on what is famous and thus, somehow, familiar—yet seemingly exotic, nonetheless. Meanwhile, in a parallel universe, some of the Big Easy's most beguiling charms converge daily at corner dives with vintage neon, local delicacies, and jukeboxes full of hometown hits.

Eating a shrimp po' boy sandwich and oyster and artichoke soup, while Fats Domino blasts away and Ignatius-esque characters rave on in confounding syntax—this constitutes a great New Orleans moment, an exquisite gallimaufry of sensory pleasures. It's what we do best. And it's why we're not leaving.

New Orleans folklorist and musician Ben Sandmel is the author of "Zydeco!"

COMING ATTRACTIONS

The New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival April 22–May 1; Fair Grounds Race Course and local venues. Twelve simultaneous stages of great regional/global music; nojazzfest.com

New Orleans Writers' Conference May 12–13; The Hotel Monteleone in the French Quarter. Get read. Get published, Get inspired. Submit your manuscript and meet one-on-one with top literary agents and editors for a personal critique; neworleanswritersconference.com

14th Annual New Orleans Wine and Food Experience May 25–29; The French Quarter and various indoor and outdoor venues. Tastings, seminars, elaborate vintner dinners; nowfe.com

Satchmo SummerFest August 4–7; Louisiana State Museum's Old U.S. Mint. Concerts, seminars, and more honoring Louis Armstrong; fqfi.org

Louisiana Book Festival October 29; State Capitol & State Library of Louisiana, downtown Baton Rouge. More than a hundred nationally acclaimed authors and poets. Writer presentations, readings, discussions, signings, book-related demonstrations; louisianabookfestival.org

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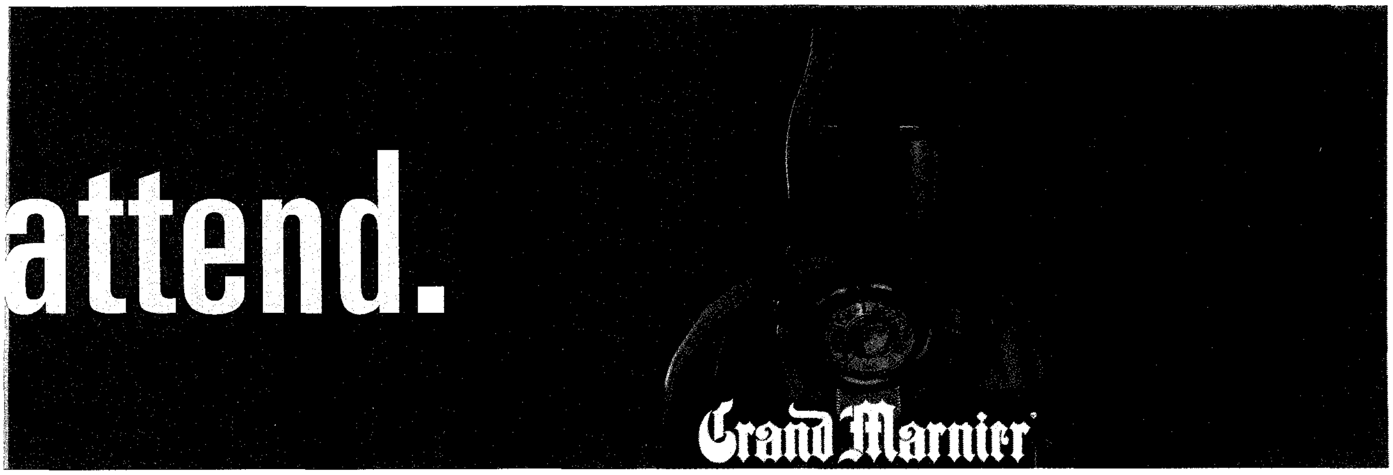
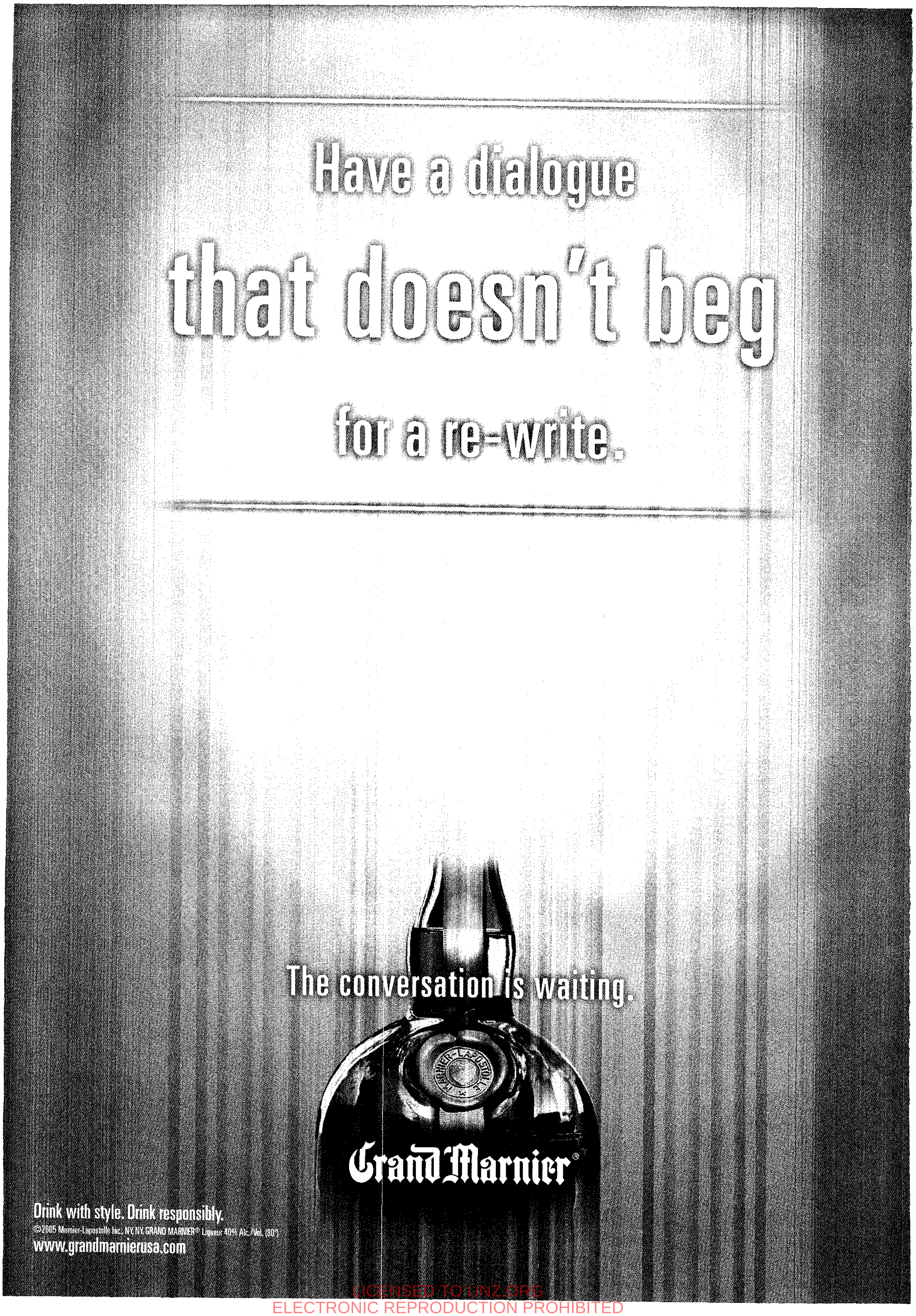
Louisiana, a great place to visit, work, and play.

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and what to pay his fellow-physicians.

"Hey, can I call you right back in two weeks?"

Over the course of thirty years, Berman told me, he'd tried paying physicians almost every conceivable way. He'd paid low salaries and high salaries and still watched them go home at three in the afternoon. He'd paid fee-for-service and watched the paperwork accumulate and the doctors run up the bills to make more money. He'd come up with complicated bonus schemes for productivity and given doctors budgets to oversee. He'd given patients cash accounts to pay their doctors themselves. But no system was able to provide both simplicity and the right balance of thriftiness and reward for good patient care.

By the mid-nineteen-eighties, sixty thousand patients had joined the Matthew Thornton Health Plan, mainly because it had controlled its costs more successfully than other plans. It had become the second-largest insurer in New Hampshire. And now it was Berman and his rules and his contracts that all the physicians complained about. In 1986, Berman left Matthew Thornton, and it was later taken over by Blue Cross. He went on to become the chief executive officer of Tufts Healthplan, one of New England's largest health insurers (where he also earned a C.E.O.'s income). The radical experiment was over.

In the United States in 2004, we spent somewhere around $1.8 trillion—15.4 per cent of all the money we have—on health care. Government and private insurance split about eighty per cent of those costs, and the rest largely came out of patients' pockets. Americans seem to be reasonably happy with their care, but they haven't liked the prices—insurance premiums increased by 9.3 per cent last year. Hospitals took about a third of the money; clinicians took another third; and the rest went for other things—nursing homes, prescription drugs, and the costs of administering our insurance system.

Physicians' after-expense incomes are a fairly small percentage of medical costs. But we're responsible for most of the spending. For the patients I see in the office in a single day, I prescribe somewhere around thirty thousand dollars' worth of medical care—in the form of specialist consultations, surgical procedures, hospital stays, X-ray imaging, and medicines. And how well these services are reimbursed inevitably affects how lavish I can be in dispensing them. This is where income becomes politics.

I remember, nine years ago, getting the bill for the heart surgery that saved my son's life. The total cost, it said, was almost a quarter-million dollars. My payment? Five dollars—the cost of the co-pay for the initial visit to the emergency room and the doctor who figured out that our pale and struggling boy was suffering from heart failure. I was an intern then, and in no position to pay for any significant part of his medical expenses. If my wife and I had had to, we would have bankrupted ourselves for him. But insurance meant that all anyone had to consider was his needs. It was a beautiful thing. Yet it's also the source of what economists call "moral hazard": with other people paying the bills, I did not care how much was spent or charged to save my child. To me, all the members of the team deserved a million dollars for what they did. Others were footing the bill—so it's left to them to question the price. Hence the adversarial relationship doctors have with insurers. Whether insurance is provided by the government or by corporations, there is no reason to think that the battles—over the fees charged, the bills rejected, the pre-approval contortions—will ever end.

Given the politics, what's striking is how substantial medical payments have continued to be. Physicians in the United States today remain better compensated than physicians anywhere else in the world. Our earnings are more than seven times those of the average American employee, and that gap has grown over time. (In most industrialized countries, the ratio is under three.) This has allowed American medicine to attract enormous talent to its ranks, and kept doctors willing to work harder than members of almost any other profession. At the same time, the politics of health care has shown little concern for the uninsured. One in seven Americans has no coverage, and one in three younger than sixty-five will lose coverage at some point in the next two years. These are people who aren't poor or old enough to qualify for government programs but whose jobs aren't good enough to provide benefits, either. Our byzantine insurance system leaves gaps at every turn.

A few days after the chairman of surgery offered me the job, I returned to his office and named my figure.

"That'll do fine," he said, and we shook hands. Now I am the one who's too embarrassed to say what I earn. We talked for a while afterward: about how to fit research in, how many nights I'd have to be on call, how to keep time for my family. The prospect of my new responsibilities filled me with both exhilaration and dread.

As the meeting was ending, though, I realized that there was one final important question I had not brought up.

"What are the health benefits like?" I asked. ♦

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MY EXES: THE SET LISTS

BY HENRY ALFORD

KATE

- “You Seem Distant”
- “Everyone Says We Look More Like Brother and Sister” (*blues version*)
- Medley: “I Have a Secret” / “The Secret Is About You” / “The Secret Is That You Don't Want the Relationship to Succeed”
- “Your Carol Channing Obsession—Explain”
- “This Is When You Kiss Me” / “You Seem Distant” (*reprise*)
- “I Think You Really Need to Confront Your Brendan Issues”

GEORGE

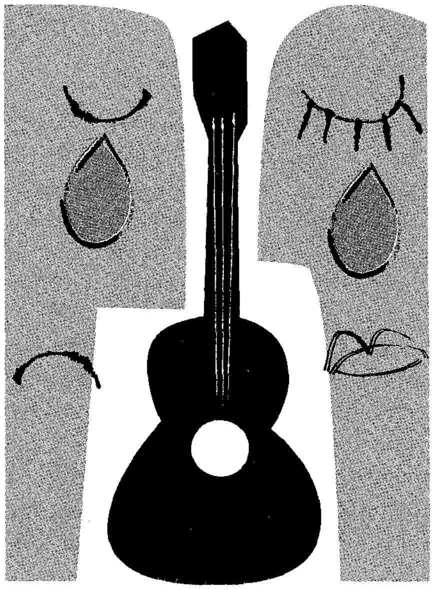
- “That Shirt Looks a Little Gay on You”
- “Can We Not Talk About That, Please?”
- “My Wintry Charm” (*a cappella*)
- “There Aren't Many People Like Me”
- “I Am Reading a Book by Georges Bataille”
- “While I Search Listlessly for Adjunct Teaching Jobs at the M.L.A., I Will Be Manning the Marxist-Studies Cash Bar”
- “That Cabbie Had a Lot of Really Interesting Arguments”
- “Although I Have a Great Big Novel Inside Me, I Am Still Able to Enjoy Reading Your Little Articles”
- “Despite Never Having Had a Job, I Have Penetrating Insights on Corporate Malfeasance”
- “Oh, Has Another One of Your Friends Published Something of Yours?”
- “Defensive?!! What the Hell Does That Mean?” (*dance mix*)
- “Things Will Be Different When I Move to Vermont”

KATE (*return engagement*)

- “This Is Kind of Weird”
- “Mutually Devoted (to Brendan)”
- “Subli-Mates” (*duet with Henry*)
- “I Think You Really Need to Confront Your Brendan Issues” (*reprise*)

BRENDAN

- “I Can Help You with That”
- “If You Want Me to Smooth Those Corners, Just Yell”
- “You and Kate Made Such a Funny Couple”
- “I Always Thought You Were Cute, I Just Wasn't Sure You Had Sex with Men”
- “Is This Your Only Whisk? (Kitchen Bitch)”
- “I'll Need a Proper Knife (Kitchen Bitch, Part Deux)”
- “Now, *That's* an Intriguing Napery Choice”
- “Lo, the New Williams-Sonoma Catalogue Is Born!” (*dance mix*)



- “That's Not Really Pink, That's Coeur de Pêche”
- “Wouldn't ‘Duvet’ Make a Really Good Candle Scent?”
- “How I Spent a Weekend Last Summer Scouring a Remote Hamlet of Ontario in Search of Cilantro”
- “How Did You Meet Sarah Jessica Parker?”

LAURIE ROSENWALD

- Medley: “I Really, Really Liked Your Editor at *Vanity Fair*” / “Do You Want to Invite Your Editor from *Vanity Fair*?” / “Many of My Activities and Friends Would Excite (if Captured Faithfully in the Pages of *Vanity Fair*)”
- “I Bought You a Whisk”
- “There’s Sarah Jessica!”
  (*Dance Break*)
- “I’m Tired (of You)”
- “Is That What You’re Wearing?”

LOUIS

- “Off My Meds”
- “Your Friends Think I’m Yoko”
- “Do You Sometimes Wish I Weren’t Here?”

RICK

- “My Collection of José Feliciano Recordings Is Noteworthy and Large”
- “Let Us Celebrate the Early Guitar Stylings of Ottmar Liebert”
- “Hot Tuna Guitarist Jorma Kaukonen, When Purely Acoustic, Achieves a Level of Brilliance That Bears Repeated Listening”
- “Django! Django! Django!”

JOHNNY

- “You Can Buy Me This if You Want To”

HECTOR

- “With Just 45 Minutes a Day, You Could Have a Really Nice Body”

BRUCE

- “I Am Performing My Gender-Studies Thesis Project at a Local Theatre, in a Leotard (It Costs $40 and Is Called ‘Manalog’)”

JAVIER

- “I Enjoy Reading Your Little Articles”

CHUCK

- “With the Right Person, I Can Have Multiple Orgasms”

MYSELF

- “Thank God *That’s* Over”
- “I Have All This Free Time Now” (*dance mix*)
- “It Worked for Thoreau”
- “Maybe Yoga”
- “I Wonder How Brendan’s Doing?” ♦

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AROUND CITY HALL

BLOOMBERG'S GAME

Why is the Mayor risking his first-term successes to build a football stadium?

BY JOHN CASSIDY

Going back to James (Gentleman Jimmy) Walker, the Jazz Age dandy who spent his evenings at the Central Park Casino and rarely got to work before noon, New Yorkers have tended to elect civic leaders who embody the historic moment. During the Great Depression, Fiorello LaGuardia, the indomitable Little Flower, revived the city's spirit and its economy by building roads, bridges, parks, swimming pools, and affordable housing. Forty years later, when the city was once again skirting bankruptcy, Ed Koch told anybody who would listen that he, for one, wasn't giving up on his home town. And on September 11, 2001, Rudolph Giuliani emerged from a hellish dust cloud to proclaim that New York would recover, and, shortly afterward, to anoint Michael R. Bloomberg as his successor.

Koch turned eighty recently, and Bloomberg threw a cocktail party for him at Gracie Mansion. Bloomberg doesn't live at Gracie Mansion—he chose to remain in his East Side town house after being elected—and he isn't a noted speaker, but he gave a warm and generous toast, lauding Koch as a great New Yorker. At six feet one, Koch towered over Bloomberg, who claims to be five feet nine but appears to be closer to five-six. The sight of them together inevitably raised questions about how the current mayor, who is up for reëlection in November, will be remembered.

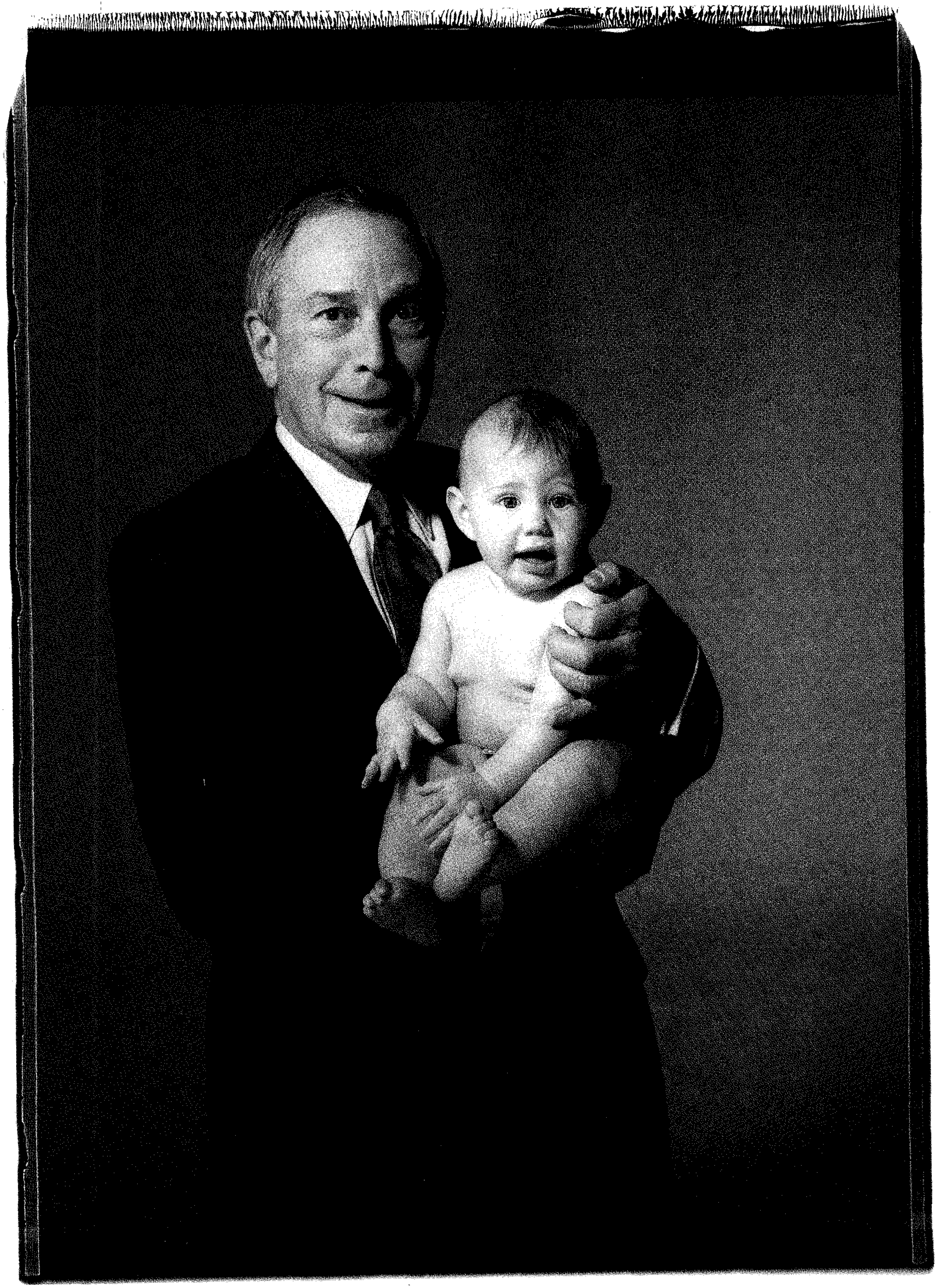
Not long ago, the answer appeared to be "With difficulty." In contrast to Giuliani, whose last months in office encompassed a bitter public divorce, a terrorist attack, and a halfhearted attempt to postpone the mayoral election, Bloomberg went about his job quietly and without fanfare. (One of his early decisions was to tell his drivers to switch off the emergency lights and sit in traffic with everybody else.) Surveys showed that New Yorkers considered him competent and diligent, but, when asked to cite things that he had done which they liked or disliked, many of them struggled to come up with any. (Smokers were an exception. They hadn't forgotten his ban on smoking in bars and restaurants.)

Recently, however, Bloomberg has been acting more like Koch and Giuliani, infuriating some, delighting others, and forcing everybody to pay attention. Last summer, during the Republican Convention, he stoutly defended the Police Department's aggressive "street-sweeping" policy toward demonstrators, alienating many liberals who had assumed that he was secretly one of them. At about the same time, Bloomberg announced that fifth graders would no longer gain automatic promotion to middle school, a policy shift that many teachers and education experts deplored. More recently, he agreed to spend three hundred million dollars of city money on a new football stadium for the New York Jets, to be placed on the West Side. If New York is awarded the 2012 Olympic Games, which Bloomberg is pursuing, the new arena would serve as an Olympic stadium. Last week, the National Football League announced that the stadium would also host the 2010 Super Bowl, assuming that it is finished by 2009.

The idea of situating a seventy-five-thousand-seat sports arena in the heart of Manhattan has enraged many New Yorkers. In a survey published earlier this month, fifty-six per cent of respondents said that they opposed the stadium, and just thirty-five per cent supported the idea. Bloomberg's rivals in the upcoming mayoral race are accusing him of wasting taxpayers' money and neglecting the concerns of ordinary citizens. "The city's education system is in disarray right now. Ask teachers, they say it; ask students, they say it," Anthony Weiner, a Democratic congressman who is running for City Hall, told me recently. "The Mayor can't change that. He's too busy with the stadium. He's spending money in the wrong place at the wrong time. It's a boondoggle, and New Yorkers know it." Fernando Ferrer, a former Bronx borough president, who is one of Weiner's rivals in the contest for the Democratic mayoral nomination, is calling for a referendum on the stadium. Another Democratic candidate, Gifford Miller, the speaker of the City Council, is trying to introduce legislation to block it.

Bloomberg's emergence as a polarizing figure has surprised many in the political world. "Friend and foe alike would say that Mike Bloomberg knows how to spend his money and his political capital," Mark Green, who was the losing candidate in the 2001 mayoral race, commented to me recently. "Also, he's very competitive, and he doesn't like to lose. Given that, I'm baffled why he's so out on a limb on the Olympics and the stadium, when he's not likely to win on either." Even some of Bloomberg's closest associates are worried that the dispute is detracting from his achievements in other areas, such as reducing crime and balancing the budget. "There is a group inside the administration that doesn't think we should be investing so much time and effort in the stadium," one senior city official said. "The Mayor talks about it every day. It has started to take over from everything else."

Shortly before Christmas, I met with Bloomberg, who is sixty-three, in "the bull pen," a big, open-plan office on the second floor of City Hall, where he works with his senior staff. The bull pen resembles Bloomberg's workspace at Bloomberg L.P., his media company, which specializes in selling financial information to Wall Street firms. (Before starting his own business, Bloomberg worked for many years at Salomon Brothers.) Seven rows of cubicles fill the room, and Bloomberg occupies a cubicle in the center. The atmosphere is informal but businesslike. "You look up from your desk, and you don't know who you are going to see," William Cunningham, Bloomberg's di-



The biggest threat to Bloomberg may be his willful disregard for the normal rules of politics. Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark.

rector of communications, told me. "One moment it is a county supervisor, the next it is Mikhail Gorbachev."

Bloomberg was wearing a conservatively cut navy-blue suit with a monogrammed pink shirt, and his tanned face showed the effects of winter weekends in the sun. (Apart from his opulent town house, Bloomberg owns homes in Vail, Bermuda, London, and Westchester County.) He looked tired. The previous day, he had flown back on his private jet from Dubrovnik, Croatia, where the European arm of the International Olympic Committee had been meeting to consider bids from five finalists—New York, Paris, London, Moscow, and Madrid—to host the 2012 Games. New York's bid had been well received, Bloomberg said, and London had also made a solid presentation, but Paris, the strong favorite to be the host city, had failed to impress. "I think London and New York moved up, and Paris moved down," Bloomberg said. "How that comes out in July in Singapore"—where the International Olympic Committee is due to make its final decision—"who knows? It's a long ways away."

In the past few months, Bloomberg has been combining his campaign for the Olympics with his other duties. When I asked him how he would assess his mayoralty, he said that one way was to "look at some numbers that tell you about the public's confidence in the city's future." He ran through several of them for me: commercial vacancy rates (some of the lowest in the country); residential real-estate prices (up a hundred per cent in three years); applications to work for the city (arriving by the thousand). "By those numerical measures, I think you have to say we are doing O.K.," Bloomberg said.

Bloomberg has an almost mystical faith in figures, which he trusts more than mere anecdotal evidence, such as the contents of the newspapers that are covering the stadium saga. (The editorial pages of the *Times*, *Newsday*, and the *Sun* have criticized Bloomberg; the *News* and the *Post* have been more supportive.) In one-on-one situations, he can be very persuasive. He made his fortune—five billion dollars, according to *Forbes*—by convincing skeptical Wall Street traders that his firm's terminals were superior to the models provided by other companies.

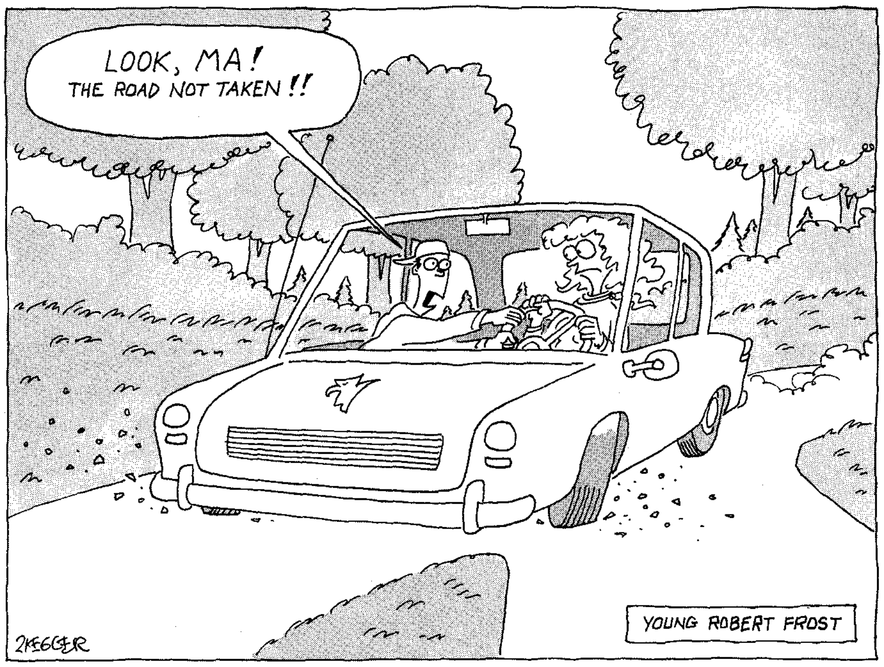
He pointed to another, less obvious sign that the city was doing well: architectural trends. "In the seventies, we built buildings that filled up the entire city block, had very few entrances and an atrium in the middle, so you never had to leave. There was a feeling that the outside was dangerous. Today, go look at the new MOMA, go look at the building my company is putting up"—on Lexington Avenue and Fifty-eighth Street—"go look at the new Hearst building. The designs bring the outside in: they are open, and you can walk right through. That is a bunch of professionals giving you some views of the future. All the great architects seem to want to work here. For a while, London had every great architect. Hong Kong had them. But they never came to New York. Now, whether it's Sir Norman Foster, or Cesar Pelli, Viñoly, Piano—they all want to work here."

It is difficult to imagine Bloomberg's predecessors judging their records in these terms, but Bloomberg, who was born and raised in Medford, Massachusetts, is less parochial than most mayors. Like many businessmen who travel a lot, he thinks globally. He often talks about securing New York's place as the world's leading city—a status that Koch and Giuliani would never have thought of questioning in the first place. One reason that he wants New York to host the Olympics—and it is also why he brought the Republican Convention here—is to showcase the city to a worldwide audience.

Unfortunately for Bloomberg, most New Yorkers don't much care what people in Europe and Asia think of them. He tries to hide his cosmopolitan tendencies, riding the subway to work, attending Yankees games, dining out on Staten Island, and wearing ethnic headgear when the occasion demands. But not even he takes this pose seriously. A few months ago, I attended a Christmas party organized by the City Hall press corps. Bloomberg took the stage in a Stetson, which he removed to reveal a Yankees cap, then a Giants cap, and, finally, a yarmulke. "People are writing that I have become more of a politician, but that is ridiculous," he quipped. Then, turning to his press secretary, Edward Skyler, he added, "Ed, can I hold a few babies?"

Occasionally, Bloomberg lets slip what he really thinks about his adopted city and some of its eight million-plus inhabitants. He has described opponents of the West Side stadium as "negativists" and "naysayers." He has even noted, accurately but inadvisedly, that New Yorkers love to gripe. "For those of you who don't live here, New Yorkers are a funny group," he told international journalists at a luncheon last month. "We welcome everybody, but we also want to have our say."

At the time I first spoke to Bloomberg, in December, the construction cost of the stadium was estimated at $1.4 billion. (It has since risen to $1.7 billion.) The city and the state had agreed to invest six hundred million dollars split equally, with the Jets paying the rest. Work needed


LOOK, MA!
THE ROAD NOT TAKEN!!
YOUNG ROBERT FROST
ZIEGLER

to begin on the stadium immediately, Bloomberg said. "If you want the Olympics, you have to build the stadium right now, but we need the stadium anyway," Bloomberg said. "It's probably the single most important economic-development project in the city."

Critics say the arena would be uneconomic, unsightly, and unnecessary. Contrary to Bloomberg's suggestion, they cannot all be dismissed as mere carpers. Many urban-planning experts believe that building a giant stadium on a site that represents the last great development opportunity in midtown would be a terrible error. Economists and fiscal watchdogs warn that paying for the Mayor's ambitious West Side plan would saddle the city with debt for generations. And many ordinary New Yorkers wonder why they should subsidize a football team that is owned by a multimillionaire—Woody Johnson—and whose fan base is in the suburbs.

When I mentioned the stadium's opponents, Bloomberg bristled. "These people," he said dismissively. "No. 1: most of the people that are criticizing it have never built anything in their lives, and they are not willing to put their own money up, so it leaves me a little cold. No. 2: the Jets have come in with eight hundred million dollars. Who else is going to come in with eight hundred million dollars? There's nobody. People say, 'Somebody will.' Look, this has been a disaster area for generations. It's also true, remember, that it takes courage to go and build things. If you want to study it forever, you will study it forever, and you will never come to any agreement."

When Bloomberg made this statement, nobody, apart from the Jets, had expressed any interest in developing the stadium site—a rail yard, owned by the Metropolitan Transit Authority, between Thirtieth Street and Thirty-third Street, west of Eleventh Avenue. But, last month, Cablevision, the media company that owns Madison Square Garden, whose business would be threatened by a rival stadium in midtown, offered the M.T.A. six hundred million dollars to buy the land and air rights, saying that it would use them for residential and commercial buildings and a five-acre park. The Jets had agreed to pay the M.T.A. just a hundred million dollars for the development rights—most of their original commitment of eight hundred million dollars was for actual construction costs. Cablevision's surprise intervention jeopardized this cozy deal, embarrassed City Hall, and prompted the M.T.A. to open up the bidding. The day it was announced, I ran into a senior city official, who smiled ruefully and said that he and his colleagues had been joking amongst themselves about what would happen if a third party came in and made an unsolicited offer. "Now it's happened," he added.

On March 21st, the Jets and Cablevision both raised their bids for the rail yard, and a third company, TransGas Energy Systems, also submitted an offer, which few took seriously. The Jets' revised bid was widely reported at seven hundred and twenty million dollars, but this was misleading. In fact, the Jets bid two hundred and eighty million dollars. The additional four hundred and forty million dollars consisted of a proposal from six developers, who have associated themselves with the Jets, to buy additional air rights, which they would transfer to adjacent sites in order to put up apartment towers. Cablevision's revised bid was seven hundred and sixty million dollars, but many of its details remained murky.

It isn't clear where this latest development leaves the stadium and Bloomberg. The M.T.A., which isn't obliged to choose the highest offer, has promised to make a decision by the end of March, but that won't be the last word on whether the stadium gets built. Even if the Jets prevail, their bid is contingent on further zoning changes, which would require the approval of the City Planning Commission and the City Council. (Cablevision's latest bid is said to be non-contingent.) The stadium also needs the authorization of a pair of upstate politicians: Joseph Bruno, the Republican leader of the Senate in Albany, and Sheldon Silver, the Democratic leader of the State Assembly. Bruno and Silver have yet to address the issue, and many observers expect them to delay as long as possible, which is the usual way of doing things in Albany. It is looking increasingly likely that Bloomberg will have to fight the election with the ultimate fate of the stadium unresolved. This is just what the Democrats want.

Back in January, 2002, when Bloomberg entered City Hall, he appeared to be something of a naysayer himself. At the time, public attention was focussed on the Yankees and the Mets, who both wanted new stadiums. Rudy Giuliani, a Yankees fan, had expressed interest in bringing the team to the West Side, but he left office without winning support for the idea, and Bloomberg showed no inclination to revive it.

Bloomberg had said in campaigning that the city couldn't afford to pay for new sports stadiums and his priority would be education reform, which he views as an economic imperative. "When it comes to jobs, we have a two-pronged strategy," he told me. "One is to improve the school system, so that our children will be able to get the jobs of tomorrow, which require a higher level of skills. The other is to make sure that companies come here and create jobs." In June, 2002, Bloomberg persuaded the State Legislature to grant him direct authority over the schools, stripping power from the local school districts, which had run them for decades. He moved the Department of Education from Livingston Street in Brooklyn to the Tweed Courthouse, directly behind City Hall, and appointed as its head Joel Klein, a fifty-eight-year-old attorney who led the Justice Department's antitrust section during the Clinton Administration.

In addition to ending "social promotion" in the third and fifth grades, Klein has established a "leadership academy" for principals; hired a parent coördinator in every school; provided extra instruction in basic literacy and mathematics for students who fall behind; and encouraged the foundation of independent charter schools. He has also closed down more than a dozen dysfunctional high schools and fired about fifty principals. Bloomberg delegates a lot of responsibility to Klein, but he personally insisted on ending social promotion. "It was not the convenient or politically correct thing to do, but at some very deep level he has to be right about the following," Klein, who attended P.S. 205, in Bensonhurst, told me. "If we keep promoting kids in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades when they can't read, then we are just storing up trouble."

The teachers' union and Democrats claim that the simultaneous introduction of so many reforms has alienated people working in the system and thrown classrooms into chaos. "The Mayor's attitude to reform is 'It's my way or the highway,' " Betsy Gotbaum, the city's public advocate, said to me. "If you are going to introduce reforms, you have to engage the people who are going to implement them." Bloomberg's critics also accuse him of failing to address what they view as the schools' primary problem: underfunding. Rather than boosting the education budget in a big way, he has called on the state to provide more assistance, and has also encouraged schools to raise funds from private sources.

A while ago, I accompanied Bloomberg and Klein to P.S. 17, an elementary school in Williamsburg, where the Robin Hood Foundation, a charity, had helped to pay for a new library. Some third, fourth, and fifth graders stood up and said how much they liked it. A strapping boy named Martin Daity drew a grimace from the Mayor by expressing the hope that it would help him to become a famous political journalist. Bloomberg rang a school bell to mark the official opening. The students cheered and sang a song entitled "We Are Marching to Our New Library." Then they marched next door for cookies and soda. After they had gone, Bloomberg took some questions, posing the first one himself: Why couldn't every elementary school in the city have a new library? "There isn't enough money to do it for every place," he replied. "Schools are one of the most important things we do, but we also have to pay our police and firefighters. There's never going to be enough money to do everything."

Bloomberg's decision to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on a sports stadium is a gift to his political opponents. However, there is a certain logic to it, given his technocratic approach to government. At Bloomberg L.P., he ran a company that had eight thousand workers and more than three billion dollars in annual revenues. As mayor, he thinks of himself as the C.E.O. of a sprawling public corporation that employs three hundred thousand people and spends about fifty billion dollars a year. Even some Democrats credit him with having been a quick learner. "He has been a lot better mayor than I expected," Mark Green said. "First, he makes few public mistakes. Second, he's shown enough energy and motivation to move around the five boroughs and avoid being labelled an out-of-touch billionaire. Third, he's an intelligent manager who, with a few exceptions, has shown he knows how to run an operation."

As a former trader, Bloomberg likes to start work early. He usually arrives at his desk before 8 A.M. and switches on a Bloomberg terminal. At nine, he and his senior staff walk across the hallway to an ornate room once occupied by the Committee of the Whole, a defunct city body, where they gather around a big wooden table. "In government, people think that in business you say jump and everybody jumps," Bloomberg told me. "That's not the way a good company is run. Good companies are run by leaders who delegate and build a consensus. In business, people think that everybody in government is lazy and incompetent. That's also not true." The main difference between running a company and running a city, Bloomberg says, is the level of scrutiny he receives from the City Council, state legislators, and the media. "In business, innovation is a lot easier, because you don't have to justify everything. In government, you do. There are lots of checks and balances. The bulk of them get in the way of progress. Having said that, they are virtually all there because of abuses in the past."

When Bloomberg took the oath of office, Wall Street was slumping, and the city's spending was outpacing its tax revenues. Under New York state law, the city is obliged to balance its books. In Bloomberg's first budget, which the City Council adopted in June, 2002, with only minor changes, he cut some services, raised the tax on cigarettes, and borrowed from the financial markets. As the economic downturn continued, it became clear that more stringent measures were needed. In November, 2002, City Hall estimated the deficit for fiscal 2004 at more than six billion dollars—a figure that prompted some commentators to draw comparisons to the financial crisis of the mid-seventies. Bloomberg introduced more spending cuts and raised residential property taxes by eighteen per cent, the biggest hike in memory,thereby violating pledges that he had made during and after his campaign, when he had said, "We will not raise taxes. We will find another way."

Bloomberg was being fiscally responsible, but he paid politically. By June, 2003, his approval rating in a *Times* poll had fallen to twenty-four per cent—the lowest rating recorded by any mayor since the *Times* began polling, twenty-five years ago. At public parades, elected officials shunned him, and he found himself marching alone. Eventually, though, the economy turned in his favor. The stock market rebounded, tourism thrived—last year, more than forty million people visited New York—and the price of real estate soared, giving a much needed boost to the city's property tax base. At the same time, the taxes that the city levies on purchases and sales of real estate brought in record revenues.

A couple of months ago, when Bloomberg released the preliminary budget for 2006, he was able to announce that the city will end fiscal 2005 with a surplus of nearly two billion dollars. In September, his administration began to send tax rebates of four hundred dollars each to more than six hundred thousand property owners. This year, he intends to send out another round of rebates, which voters will receive just before Election Day.

Looking back, Bloomberg says that raising taxes was the most difficult decision he has made, but he doesn't regret it. "I'm not in favor of taxes. Nobody is," he told me. "I think they do hurt us from a competitive point of view. But the fact that the city is doing well now vindicates my belief that there are more important things than cutting taxes: bringing crime down, beautifying the parks, cleaning the streets, building houses—all that sort of stuff."

In the run-up to the election, Bloomberg wants to keep people's attention fixed on the economy, and not simply to extol its recovery. As a successful entrepreneur, he believes, above all else, in the constant pursuit of innovation and growth. "Let's not just sit here and say that just because our hotels are full and tourism is at record levels that everything is going well," he said to me. "We still have a structural problem in our budget—our expenses exceed our revenues by billions of dollars. We have to grow the city."

Bloomberg is undoubtedly right when he says that New York still faces great fiscal challenges. City outlays are rising inexorably, and the property boom won't last forever. Cutbacks in federal and state aid are responsible for some of the spend-

"Peterson wasn't suicidal at all—he was migratory."

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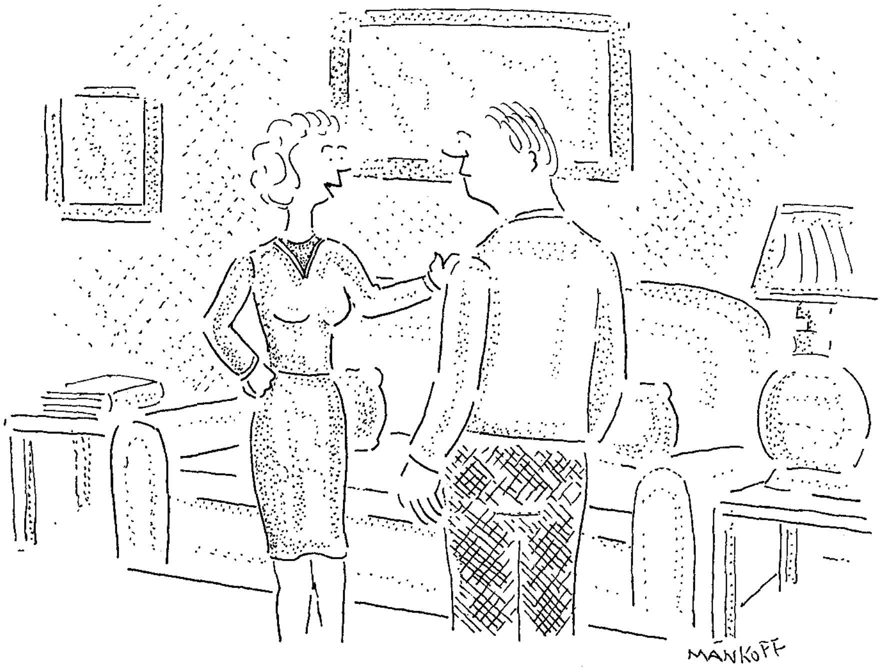
ing growth, especially in Medicaid, but the biggest item in the city's budget is still the wages and salaries of city workers. Although the number of people employed by the city has fallen by about sixteen thousand in Bloomberg's term, a sharp rise in the cost of employee benefits, especially health-care and retirement benefits, has meant that payroll spending has continued to rise. The city now spends about half as much on benefits as it does on wages. When the Department of Education hires a teacher at forty thousand dollars a year, which is about what junior teachers make, the city ends up having to spend, on average, about fifty-two thousand dollars.

Conservatives say that Bloomberg should have cut spending further. "His strategy has been to raise taxes, squeeze a little bit more out of the agencies, and pray that Wall Street comes through," Steven Malanga, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, said to me recently. Malanga's characterization isn't wholly inaccurate, but it ignores the fact that Bloomberg is concentrating on the revenue side of the budget equation. During the past two years, he has laid out the most ambitious economic-development plan that the city has seen since LaGuardia's day. In his 2003 State of the City address, he made the case for moving beyond the rebuilding of lower Manhattan and embarking on major construction projects elsewhere—downtown Brooklyn, Randall's Island, Williamsburg and Greenpoint, Hunts Point, Homeport, on Staten Island, and, of course, the West Side of Manhattan. In each of these areas, the Mayor argued, the city could stimulate economic growth and boost tax revenues by rezoning underused land, clearing away bureaucratic red tape, and investing in public works, such as subways, roads, and parks. "When we lead with public infrastructure, the private market will follow," he declared.

Bloomberg's economic-development strategy isn't often described as a budget policy, but that is how he sees it. In business, firms routinely make costly investments to generate higher revenues in the long term. At Bloomberg L.P., which he still owns, Bloomberg invested in a powerful new technology, desktop computers, to create a multinational company. Even now, while he is in City Hall, the firm is trying to break into a new market: specialized information for lawyers. "It's an enormous investment," Bloomberg said in one of our conversations. "I don't know whether it is going to pay off. But I do know that we have to try new things and have another market for our product down the road."

What makes sense for a corporation, Bloomberg is convinced, makes sense for a city. "If we don't build these things—not just the stadium but things like this—we are not going to have the tax revenues to pay the municipal workforce," he told me. "The municipal unions should be the biggest supporters of this. The minority community should be the biggest sup-



"Silly man, that wasn't an affair—I was just riffing on our marriage."

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porter of this. We have to build these things or we are never going to have the tax base that we need."

In the physical history of New York, a number of dates stand out: 1811, when Manhattan adopted the grid pattern for its streets; 1857, when work started on Central Park; 1883, when the Brooklyn Bridge was completed; 1904, when the first subway line started operating; 1931, when the Empire State Building was dedicated and the George Washington Bridge opened; 1946, when the United Nations decided to situate itself on the East River; 1966, when construction started on the World Trade Center and Governor Rockefeller announced his plan for Battery Park City; 1980, when the city and state agreed to renovate Times Square; and 2001, when the World Trade Center was destroyed. Bloomberg is trying to add 2005 to this list.

By 2025, City Hall hopes, the Hudson Yards development zone, which extends from West Twenty-eighth Street to West Forty-third Street, and from Eighth Avenue to the river, will be a thriving central business district. It will contain twenty-eight million square feet of commercial space, including one and a half million square feet of hotel space and seven hundred thousand square feet of retail space. There will also be some thirteen thousand apartments. This would be akin to dropping downtown Denver onto the West Side. The official rendering of the redeveloped area shows office towers lining Tenth and Eleventh Avenues and a tree-lined pedestrian boulevard extending from Forty-second Street to Thirty-third Street midway between Tenth Avenue and Eleventh Avenue. At the southern end of this thoroughfare, there is a six-acre park, adjacent to which the new stadium rises—majestically or ominously, depending on your point of view—above the West Side Highway.

At the moment, Hudson Yards is a low-rise neighborhood that covers three hundred and sixty acres, making it four times as big as the Battery Park City development zone. By almost any standards, it is bleak. Among its notable architectural features are the Port Authority Bus Terminal, the entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel, the cavernous Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, which blocks access to the river between Thirty-fourth Street and Thirty-ninth Street, and the Manhattan tow pound. Highways, access ramps, and rail lines blight the landscape, breaking up the grid pattern and making it difficult to traverse on foot. Below Thirty-fourth Street, the M.T.A. rail yard, which is hidden behind high concrete walls, is the dominant feature. (The tracks lead to Penn Station, which is two blocks east.) Nearby, there is a Greyhound-bus parking depot, a Sanitation Department refuelling station, and several vacant lots.

To build a vast sports arena on top of the rail yard would be a feat of engineering. Constructing a reinforced-concrete platform over the yard to serve as the stadium's foundation would cost city and state taxpayers about three hundred million dollars, and another three hundred million dollars of public money would go toward a retractable roof, so the facility could be used year-round. The city is planning to spend two billion dollars to extend the No. 7 subway line from Times Square and three hundred and fifty million dollars to expand the Javits Center. In addition, hundreds of millions of dollars have been slated for new parks and roads, and for restoring the waterfront.

The city's total commitment to the West Side could end up exceeding three billion dollars. Bloomberg insisted to me that this spending won't affect other city projects, such as the construction of new schools, because it will be financed outside the regular budget. Under his plan, the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation, a quasi-independent agency, would issue bonds to pay for most of the investments. "You can't go borrow to give the teachers a salary raise," Bloomberg said. "You can borrow to build something that is going to employ a lot of people and generate a lot of tax revenues."

In recent years, New York's economy has created lots of jobs for bankers, media people, lawyers, and other professionals. However, as Bloomberg pointed out, the majority of the city's inhabitants are neither affluent nor well educated. "A lot of them are immigrants, but they are also people that have been left back for a long time. These people need a different type of job, in service industries—restaurants, hotels, transportation, that type of thing. Generally, those jobs can have pensions and health benefits and security, but they are in businesses that are often seasonal. We have to flatten out that seasonality. That means the convention business has to be developed. We are well behind any city remotely like us on the list of convention facilities. People don't seem to understand how bad off we are."

As Bloomberg ticked off the points he

wanted to make, he gently thumped the table. "Let's assume we just expand the Javits Center," he said. "Given the physical amount of land we have, we will never be able to have more space than Chicago, Las Vegas, or many other cities. We've got to look for something that is unique. That is the ability to seat seventy-five thousand people for the opening night. That is the ability to have two hundred thousand square feet of open space, with big high ceilings, where you can do lots of visuals. That is the New York Sports & Convention Center. The trouble is, it has got the name 'stadium' attached to it. Why? Because the Jets are coming in willing to put eight hundred million dollars into it."

After stopping to take a breath, Bloomberg went on, "I don't care, quite honestly, whether the Jets play here or in New Jersey. From an economic point of view, most people who have tickets live around here already. They don't come and stay in hotels to go to a Jets game. On the other hand, using the facility for conventions and all these other things, that is where the money is."

Bloomberg cited a study by the Independent Budget Office, a nonpartisan city agency, which he said demonstrated that during the next thirty years the new facility would generate hundreds of millions of dollars for the city treasury. "People say, 'Build the stadium elsewhere, in Queens,'" he said. "There's one problem—it's not going to be rented other than the ten days the Jets use it, so there's no revenue. The city and state can't pour money in unless there is an economic benefit. What makes this work is that it's really a convention facility that the Jets, for their own reasons, want to pay for."

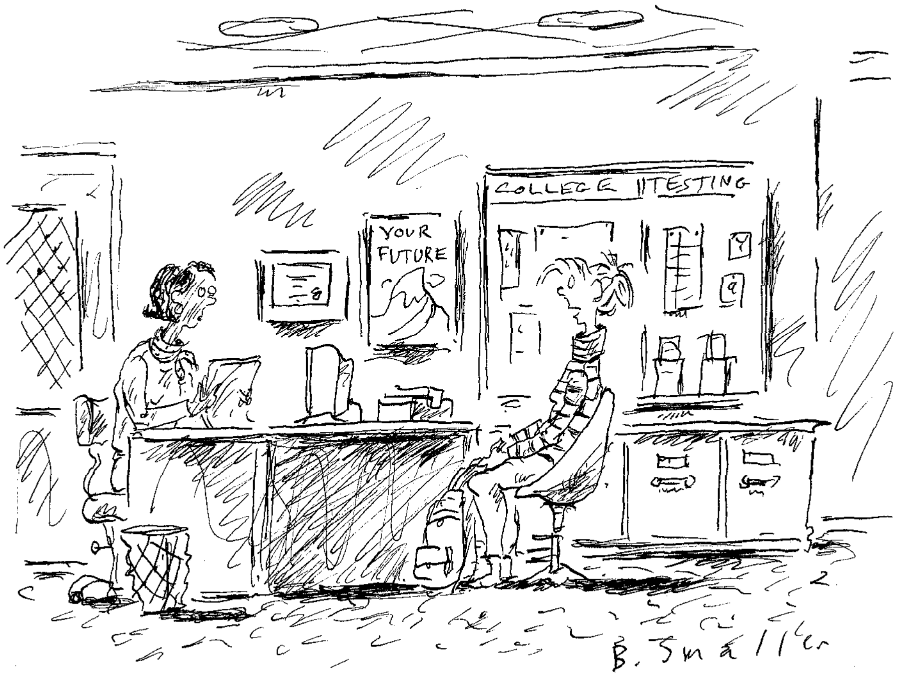
The person primarily responsible for Bloomberg's economic-development plan is Daniel Doctoroff, a forty-six-year-old former investment banker who is the deputy mayor for economic development and rebuilding. In political circles, Doctoroff is now widely viewed as the second most powerful man in City Hall. Many credit him with persuading Bloomberg to support the stadium plan in the first place. "My understanding is that Dan convinced the Mayor early on that this was very important to his legacy," Betsy Gotbaum said. People who work for Bloomberg also acknowledge Doctoroff's influence. "I honestly don't know how the Mayor has got so swept up with the stadium, and I think some of the other people in the administration don't know, either," a city official told me. "I think it's partly Dan's salesmanship, and partly that he firmly believes in the economic arguments."

Doctoroff is tall and athletic, with brown eyes, gray wavy hair, and a Roman nose. As his title suggests, he was originally expected to spend most of his time on the reconstruction of lower Manhattan, but the state has taken the lead in that effort. (Governor Pataki controls the Port Authority, which controls the World Trade Center site.) During the Giuliani administration, Doctoroff set up NYC 2012, the organization bidding for the Olympics. He was then working on Wall Street, where he was the managing partner of a successful investment company, Oak Hill Capital Partners. After Bloomberg's victory, Doctoroff moved to City Hall, where he still oversees the Olympics bid. "From the very beginning, the Mayor made the decision to place all the different economic-development agencies under one person," Doctoroff said when I met him at City Hall recently. "What we have done, working with him, is develop a coherent strategy that takes into account the history of this city, the competitive factors we face, our strengths and our weaknesses. That is what makes it different from what we've seen before, and it flows from the Mayor's experience in the private sector."

Doctoroff is not overburdened with modesty, and, like his boss, he thinks globally. "Historically, New York has had the reputation of being the kind of place that says to businesses, 'Hey, we're New York. If you want to come, great. If you don't want to come, that's fine, too,'" he said. "In an increasingly competitive world, we can't afford to be that way. We aren't just talking about competition with New Jersey, Chicago, or Los Angeles. We're not even just talking about competition with London, which may be our most direct competitor in some ways. Look at Shanghai. Look at what Shanghai was two years ago, and look at what Shanghai is today—a completely different place."

Since the Chinese economy is expanding at near double-digit rates, it is hard to believe that New York will match the growth rates of Shanghai or Beijing. Still, as a global leader in finance, media, and fashion, the city should expect to see its economy expanding at a healthy pace. Expansion requires space, however, which is why Bloomberg and Doctoroff fastened their attention on the far West Side.

In the early nineties, the Regional Plan Association, a think tank on development issues, drew up a range of proposals for the West Side, all of which featured residential and commercial development. The group also examined the possibility of building an arena for the Yankees, in the style of Camden Yards, in Baltimore,

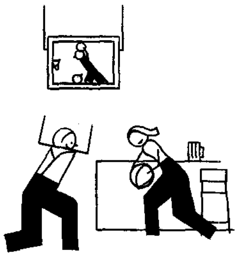


"My first-choice college should have lots of closet space."

but ultimately rejected it as unsightly and uneconomic. "We never even contemplated a football stadium, because the footprint is so large," Robert Yaro, the planning association's president, recalled. During the dot-com era, the idea of developing the West Side was raised again, amid concerns that New York lacked room to house start-up companies. In June, 2001, the Group of 35, a panel of politicians, urban planners, and business executives, convened by Senator Charles Schumer, issued a report calling for the construction of sixty million square feet of office space by 2020, much of it on the West Side.

After Bloomberg came to office, the Economic Development Corporation, a quasi-independent body that reports to Doctoroff, produced an estimate of seventy million square feet for the amount of new office space that the city will need by 2035. If developers were to build on every currently available commercial site, the E.D.C. concluded, they could create perhaps half this amount of space, leaving a big gap for development zones to fit. "We don't feel like we have a choice," Doctoroff said, as he explained the decision to develop the West Side. "Over the last ten years, more than sixty thousand jobs fled New York City for the New Jersey waterfront."

Under Doctoroff's influence, development policy and the Olympics bid have become intertwined. Many experts have questioned the economic value of the Games, which have left some host cities, such as Montreal and Athens, heavily in debt, but Doctoroff believes that New York, with its diverse ethnic heritage, could host a successful Games and also make money. In 1996, he hired Alexander Garvin, a professor of urban planning at Yale, to devise a plan for staging the Games that would exploit New York's unique topography. Garvin came up with an "X-plan," which is best understood by visualizing a slightly crooked "X" drawn across a map of the five boroughs. As part of the scheme, he situated the Olympic stadium on the West Side of Manhattan. "We had to figure out where to put the main stadium, the press center, and the broadcasting center," Jay Kriegel, the executive director of NYC 2012, said to me. "Garvin came in one day and laid out the X-plan, with the West Side as its centerpiece. It solved a lot of problems."



One problem that Garvin's X-plan didn't solve was who would pay for the Olympic stadium. In 2000, Woody Johnson, an heir to the Johnson & Johnson fortune, bought the New York Jets and decided to move the team back into the city, which it had left in 1984, when it stopped playing at Shea Stadium. Doctoroff started talking with Johnson, casually at first, and then, after he joined the Bloomberg administration, more seriously. Last March, a deal between the city and the Jets was announced. "The stadium idea wasn't budgeted," Kriegel recalled. "Then the Jets came along."

Inevitably, questions have arisen about Doctoroff's dual role as the city's economic czar and the de-facto head of the Olympics bid. Andrea Bernstein, of the public radio station WNYC, and Tom Robbins, of the *Village Voice*, have reported that builders and financiers with interests in Hudson Yards and other development zones have attempted to curry favor with Doctoroff by making financial contributions to NYC 2012, which needs money to pay for the bid. A family foundation controlled by Woody Johnson has given more than a million dollars. Several banks that have been hired to help finance the Hudson Yards project—Goldman Sachs, J. P. Morgan, and Bear, Stearns—have also made sizable donations. The developers who have contributed to NYC 2012 include Douglas Durst, Steven Roth, and Stephen Ross, an old friend of Doctoroff's.

Although Bernstein and Robbins didn't provide any direct evidence of companies' receiving favorable treatment in return for donations to NYC 2012, their stories demonstrated how it is now almost impossible to separate development issues from the Olympics bid. The West Side stadium is one of many Olympic sites that would be built in development zones. In Brooklyn, the Atlantic Yards arena, which the developer Bruce Ratner hopes to build for his New Jersey Nets franchise, would host gymnastics. Swimming and diving would take place at an aquatic center on the Williamsburg waterfront, which is scheduled to be rezoned, and the Olympic Village would be a couple of miles north, directly across from the United Nations. In the Harlem Yards development zone, a velodrome and arena would host cycling and badminton.

Doctoroff makes no apology for linking development policy to the Olympics bid. One of the main reasons for hosting the Games, he told me, is to revitalize depressed neighborhoods by building world-class sports facilities that New Yorkers will be able to use for decades. "Atlanta made a small profit" from hosting the 1996 Games, he said, "but the real profit was in the six hundred million dollars' worth of housing and recreational facilities that were built and left to the community as a legacy." Bloomberg agrees. "The Games would be great for the city," he insisted. "Great buildings. Great pride."

Many opponents of the stadium support the Olympics bid; they just don't think it justifies building a stadium in midtown. One of them is Richard Ravitch, a seventy-one-year-old businessman with a wealth of experience in city government, urban planning, and budget issues. Ravitch started out as a developer. From 1979 until 1984, he chaired the M.T.A., which operates the subways, the buses, Metro-North, and the Long Island Rail Road. In 1989, he ran for mayor, losing to David Dinkins in the Democratic primary. Today, he is a successful lawyer and business consultant. Although nominally a Democrat, he thinks of himself as a nonpartisan moderate, much as Bloomberg does.

A while ago, I spoke with Ravitch at his office in Rockefeller Center. He told me that to begin with he didn't have any objection in principle to developing the M.T.A. rail yard, although he was concerned that the agency, which has heavy debts, should get full value for the site. But the more Ravitch learned about Bloomberg's plans for the West Side, the more agitated he became. Between now and 2011, the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation is planning to issue about three billion dollars in bonds to finance the extension of the No. 7 line and other infrastructure projects. Like all loans, these bonds will need to be serviced. Under the city's plan, the cash to pay the interest on the debt, and eventually to retire it, will come from payments that developers who put up new buildings in

THE POET WITH HIS FACE IN HIS HANDS

You want to cry aloud for your
mistakes. But to tell the truth the world
doesn't need any more of that sound.

So if you're going to do it and can't
stop yourself, if your pretty mouth can't
hold it in, at least go by yourself across

the forty fields and the forty dark inclines
of rocks and water to the place where
the falls are flinging out their white sheets

like crazy, and there is a cave behind all that
jubilation and water fun and you can
stand there, under it, and roar all you

want and nothing will be disturbed; you can
drip with despair all afternoon and still,
on a green branch, its wings just lightly touched

by the passing foil of the water, the thrush,
puffing out its spotted breast, will sing
of the perfect, stone-hard beauty of everything.

—*Mary Oliver*

Hudson Yards will make to the city—a financing scheme that Doctoroff described to me as "creative."

Ravitch, a man with a long memory, has a different view. In 1965, the State Legislature gave the city the authority to borrow against estimated tax revenues instead of against actual ones. In subsequent years, the city and a state body, the Urban Development Corporation, borrowed heavily. When tax revenues came in lower than expected, they didn't have enough money to service their debts, and they had to be bailed out. The West Side plan struck Ravitch as eerily reminiscent of what happened a generation ago. "I spent ten years of my life clearing up the mess that people of good will and integrity created in the sixties and seventies," he said. "I saw in the West Side plan all of the things that had led to the crisis of the seventies, and I thought, If I don't speak out, why should I expect anybody else to?"

In the past few months, Ravitch has expressed his objections to the West Side plan in a variety of venues, but Bloomberg has not been receptive. "The Mayor is clearly very bright," Ravitch said, "and, like nearly all successful businessmen, he's not filled with self-doubt. That is the most felicitous way I can put it. He sincerely wants to do the right thing, but he doesn't welcome counsel—at least, that was my impression."

The most vocal and effective critic of the stadium plan has been James Dolan, Cablevision's chief executive. Last year, Dolan launched an advertising campaign that attacked City Hall's planned subsidy to the Jets. For a while, Bloomberg and his colleagues weren't too concerned. Cablevision is an unpopular cable monopoly, and Dolan has overseen the decline of two of the city's favorite sports teams: the Knicks and the Rangers. After taking over as chief executive of Cablevision from his father, Charles Dolan, who founded the company, he bought out of bankruptcy the electronics chain The Wiz only to close it down five years later, after it made more heavy losses. "Do we really want one of the worst businessmen in history to be dictating the city's economic-development policy?" Ed Skyler, Bloomberg's press secretary, said to the *Times*. But Dolan has proved to be a determined foe. Even before his surprise bid for the development rights to the M.T.A. rail yard, he kept the stadium proposal in the news and allowed less self-interested parties to marshal their arguments, which City Hall has had trouble refuting.

It is now clear, for example, that, despite the Mayor's assurances, the stadium could well end up being a burden on city taxpayers. According to the Independent Budget Office's latest "baseline" projection, between now and 2036 the stadium would generate for the city treasury about four or five million dollars a year over and above its annual cost in interest payments, a modest but positive return. (These figures are in 2005 dollars.) However, the I.B.O.'s calculations assume that the stadium will be able to attract twenty-four trade shows a year, which is an optimistic assessment. The convention industry is suffering from chronic overcapacity, with cities all across the country struggling to attract visitors. In a recent study published by the Brookings Institution, Heywood T. Sanders, a political scientist at the University of Texas at San Antonio, noted that "many cities have seen their convention attendance fall by 40 per cent, 50 per cent, and more since the peak years of the late 1990s." If the stadium were to fail to attract enough convention business, it would have great difficulty paying its way.

From a long-term perspective, another critical issue is whether the stadium would stimulate development elsewhere on the West Side. Many economists and urban-planning experts doubt that it would. "When you go around the country, across the street from these things there is nothing except parking lots and auto-repair shops," the Regional Plan Association's Robert Yaro said. "The experience is that sports stadiums repel economic activity. Nobody wants to live across the street from these things. Nobody wants to work across the street from these things." Ronnie Lowenstein, the head of the Independent Budget Office, agreed. "The economic literature is very clear on that," she said. "Stadiums are not good economic-development tools."

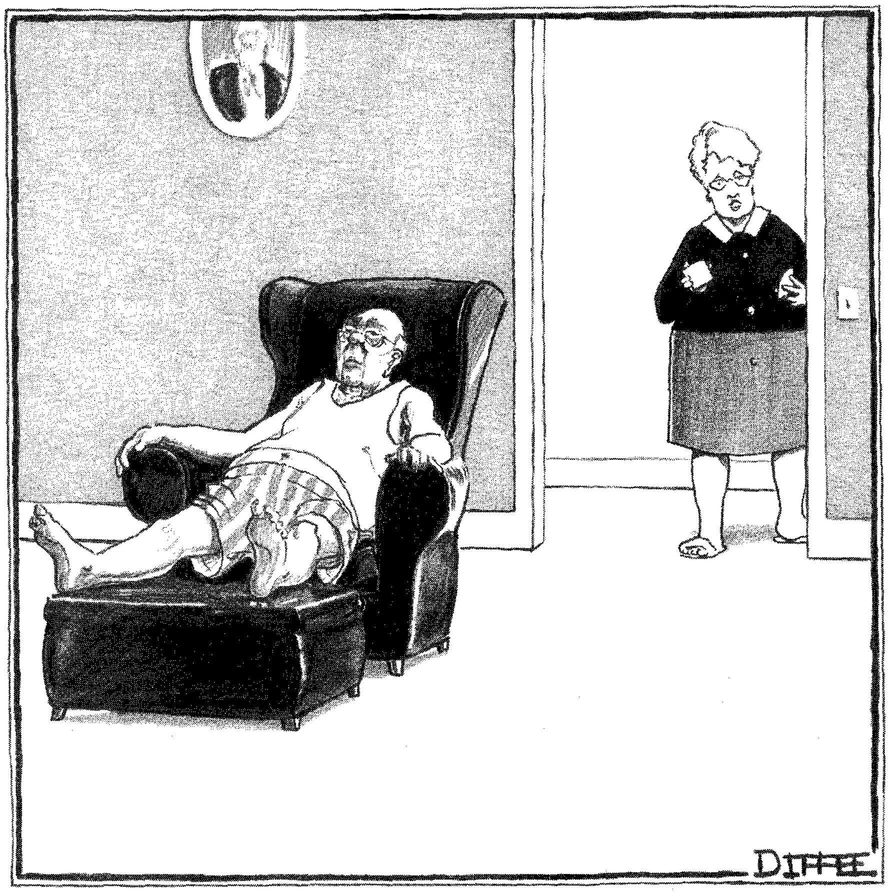
As the dispute over the stadium has escalated and Bloomberg's poll ratings have started to suffer, his advisers have been attempting to portray him as a visionary. "They don't remember the mayors who said, 'Let's not do anything,'" Cunningham, Bloomberg's director of communications, said to me. "They remember the mayors who said, 'Let's build for the future.' LaGuardia's not considered a great mayor because he wore funny hats and was a short guy. He built the Triborough Bridge and the West Side Highway. When New York stops building, it's not New York."

Cunningham's peroration contained some truth, but Bloomberg isn't trying to build a bridge, a road, or any other public facility. On the West Side, he is ultimately proposing to build a new stadium for an N.F.L. franchise, more hotels and convention space for out-of-towners, and yet more luxury condominiums—hardly a campaign rallying cry. However, if he can somehow divert attention from the stadium, he does have a record of tackling intractable issues in other areas, such as homelessness.

Between 1999 and 2003, the number of people in the city's homeless shelters increased by seventy per cent, to more than thirty-eight thousand. Last June, a task force appointed by Bloomberg presented him with a plan designed to end chronic homelessness in ten years. "The Mayor said, 'I'm term-limited to eight years,' " Shaun Donovan, the city's housing commissioner, recalled. "He said, 'You might like a ten-year plan, because you can't be held accountable, but I want to be held accountable. Make it a five-year plan.' " Linda Gibbs, the head of the Department of Homeless Services, was stunned by Bloomberg's suggestion. "He was, like, 'Can you do it?' I was, like, 'Ugh.' I didn't want to say no," she told me.

The new plan, which included setting up community programs to try to prevent homelessness, has been in operation for less than a year, but it seems to be having some impact. The over-all number of people living in shelters has stabilized, and the number of families in shelters has fallen slightly. Meanwhile, under a separate program, more than twenty-six thousand units of affordable housing have been built, many of them in poor neighborhoods, such as Harlem and Bushwick.

Bloomberg's perceived independence is his biggest strength, but it isn't enough to guarantee his reëlection. In a city where whites make up less than half of the population, and where registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans by nearly six to one, Fernando Ferrer, who is bidding to become New York's first Hispanic mayor, could be tough to beat. Last week, a Newsday/NY1 poll showed Ferrer leading Bloomberg by forty-nine per cent to thirty-five per cent in a head-to-head contest, and a WNBC/Marist College Institute poll showed Ferrer up by forty-nine per cent to forty-two per cent. "What Mike and his people can't know for sure is whether his mayoralty is a momentary and freakish end to the tragic events of 2001," Mark Green said. "It's a different election now. It's not 2001."



"Wilfred, did you leave the lid off the body glitter?"

To boost his chances, Bloomberg is trying to woo minority voters and politicians, many of whom support his economic-development plans. The Harlem congressman Charles Rangel and the Reverend Al Sharpton have both come out in favor of the West Side stadium, saying that it would create jobs for minority workers. In Brooklyn, blacks and Hispanics generally support the proposal to build a basketball arena at the intersection of Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues. (Many white property owners oppose it.)

One evening this winter, Bloomberg held a town-hall meeting in Cambria Heights, Queens, a leafy African-American neighborhood on the city's eastern border, near the Belmont racetrack. When I arrived, about five hundred residents were packed into an auditorium at Sacred Heart School. Barbara Clark, the neighborhood's State Assembly representative, stood and praised Bloomberg for trying to improve the education system. "This is a middle-class community, but we don't have public schools here that people want to send their kids to," she said. I asked Clark, who is a lifelong Democrat, whether Bloomberg's ties to the Republican Party made much difference to how he is perceived in the area. "I don't think so," she replied with a laugh. "I don't think anybody really believes that the Mayor is a Republican."

When Bloomberg arrived, he said that Cambria Heights reminded him of the town where he grew up, and asked for questions. He didn't get any about the stadium. A grandmother in a red coat named Anne Miller asked him when the high weeds on Linden Boulevard between 221st Street and 222nd Street would be chopped down. "Does 'By Monday' work?" Bloomberg replied. The president of the Cambria Heights Little League inquired whether a decrepit park could be cleaned up. Bloomberg said that it could. Bob Wilkinson, an elderly man with white hair, asked about the property-tax rebate, which he was still waiting to receive. A few weeks previously, he said, the Department of Finance had sent a check for four hundred dollars to his house, but it was addressed to the previous owner, who died in 1970. "I wrote on the envelope and sent it back, but it came back again," Wilkinson said, to loud guffaws around the hall. "Mr. Mayor, how should I proceed?"

Last month, a delegation from the International Olympic Committee spent four days in New York, touring the proposed Olympic sites, asking questions, and being fêted by, among others, Donald Trump and Whoopi Goldberg. Doctoroff led NYC 2012's presentations, but Bloomberg also played a prominent role, comparing the Olympic ideals of diversity, competition, and opportunity to New York's own values, and inviting the visitors to dinner at his home. At a lunch reception that I attended, he gave a moving speech, without notes, invoking his grandparents, who came to New York from Ukraine and Lithuania, and his daughter, Georgina, who hopes to compete for a place on the U.S. equestrian team. "I have no greater dream than to see my daughter win a gold medal on Staten Island, in New York City," Bloomberg said. "It would be the ultimate capstone of my life."

Before the I.O.C. representatives left, their leader, Nawal El Moutawakel, a former Olympic hurdler from Morocco, praised New York's bid and said of the Mayor, "He is a winner, and his team is a winning team." "She didn't have to be so generous," a beaming Bloomberg told me a few days later in City Hall. "I was surprised. Usually, they don't say anything." The Olympic officials had gone away impressed, he added, and there was now a real chance of New York's getting the 2012 Games. "The committee clearly said to us, 'We need to have a stadium. Get over that one.' But, once we have a stadium, I do think we have a good chance."

The professional oddsmakers, who don't allow local pride to bias their calculations, believe that Paris and London are still far more likely to be chosen than New York. Even if the stadium goes ahead, the I.O.C. might well choose another city. Some Democrats privately relish this scenario, believing that it would leave the Mayor in an awkward position, but Bloomberg insisted that if the Olympics bid fails he will fight just as vigorously for the stadium. "Without it, ten years from now nothing will be done on the West Side," he said.

Unlike in our previous encounters, he acknowledged that nobody could be sure how much convention business the stadium would generate, but he also argued that this was no reason to stall: "If you take a look and do a real economic assessment of these deals, there are no guarantees. So, if you want to stop something, you say we can't guarantee that anybody is going to use it. That's true, but in this case I know it's going to be used. Forty per cent of the debt service for the city and state's part of this project is already paid for by the Jets. In business, nobody ever gets a chance to start a project where forty per cent of the revenue needs are guaranteed."

When I asked Bloomberg how the stadium controversy had affected his chances of being reëlected, he replied, "We are doing an experiment, and I'll give you an answer on November the eighth." Given the Mayor's virtually unlimited campaign budget, he is sure to be a formidable candidate. With more than seven months to go until voting day, his campaign has already spent over five million dollars. "I am always amazed at writers who cover his electoral prospects as if he were called Mike Smith," Mark Green noted. "They write about education, crime, and so on, not mentioning the biggest factor of all—his money. In 2001, I spent about sixteen and a half million dollars—twelve million that I raised and four and a half million in public funds. But Mike's direct-mail budget alone was seventeen million dollars, more than the entire budget for my campaign. I would stand there each day and see pieces of mail targeted at every ethnic group and Zip Code in the city, and there was no way I could respond."

The biggest threat to Bloomberg may be his own willful disregard for the normal rules of electoral politics. After three years in City Hall, he still cannot hide his scorn for regular politicians, who pay attention to popular opinion. "Let me say something," he said. "If you told me that the stadium was detrimental to my reëlection chances, I would probably fight for it even harder. I wasn't hired to think about the politics. My job is to do what I think is right, cognizant of everybody's interests, and, to the extent I can, to make everybody agree with me. But I was not hired to do a poll every day and just slavishly follow it."

Bloomberg was starting to sound suspiciously like any ordinary politician whose grand vision is under attack from voters. His ultimate aim, he went on, is to secure New York's future as a place of risk-taking, innovation, and enterprise, the sort of place where people do things that others question, such as putting up iconoclastic buildings, creating new media companies, and covering Central Park with pieces of orange fabric hung from vinyl gates. "Look at the history of 'The Gates,'" he said, referring to the lengthy struggle that his friends Christo and Jeanne-Claude had encountered in putting up their recent art installation. "Why that many people would be that upset about something that goes on for two weeks, once in a lifetime, I don't know, but it was very, very controversial. Now everybody thinks, looking back, that it was the right thing to do. It was great for the spirit of the city, great for the economy."

It was late in the afternoon, and outside another snowstorm was blanketing the city from Riverdale to Far Rockaway. Bloomberg was speaking fast, staring at me intently, and gesticulating. "It would be a tragedy if we let the naysayers stop us doing things," he said. "What has always been great about New York has been that we've built the big things and taken the risks. People say, 'You were a business guy. You don't understand politics.' Yes. I was a very successful business guy because we took the risks in the business. We built for the future. You never know what the future is going to be like, but you have to build in advance. Running risks is exactly what you want to do. If you don't run any risks, you will never make any progress." ♦

PROFILES

PASSION PLAYS

The making of Edward Albee.

BY LARISSA MacFARQUHAR

Never trust a man who loves animals. First, ask him why he loves them. If he says that he loves them because they are artless and innocent, or incapable of duplicity, or because of the wholehearted unselfishness of their affection, or because their souls are not tainted by envy, or something like that, beware. It is likely that that man is of two minds about humans.

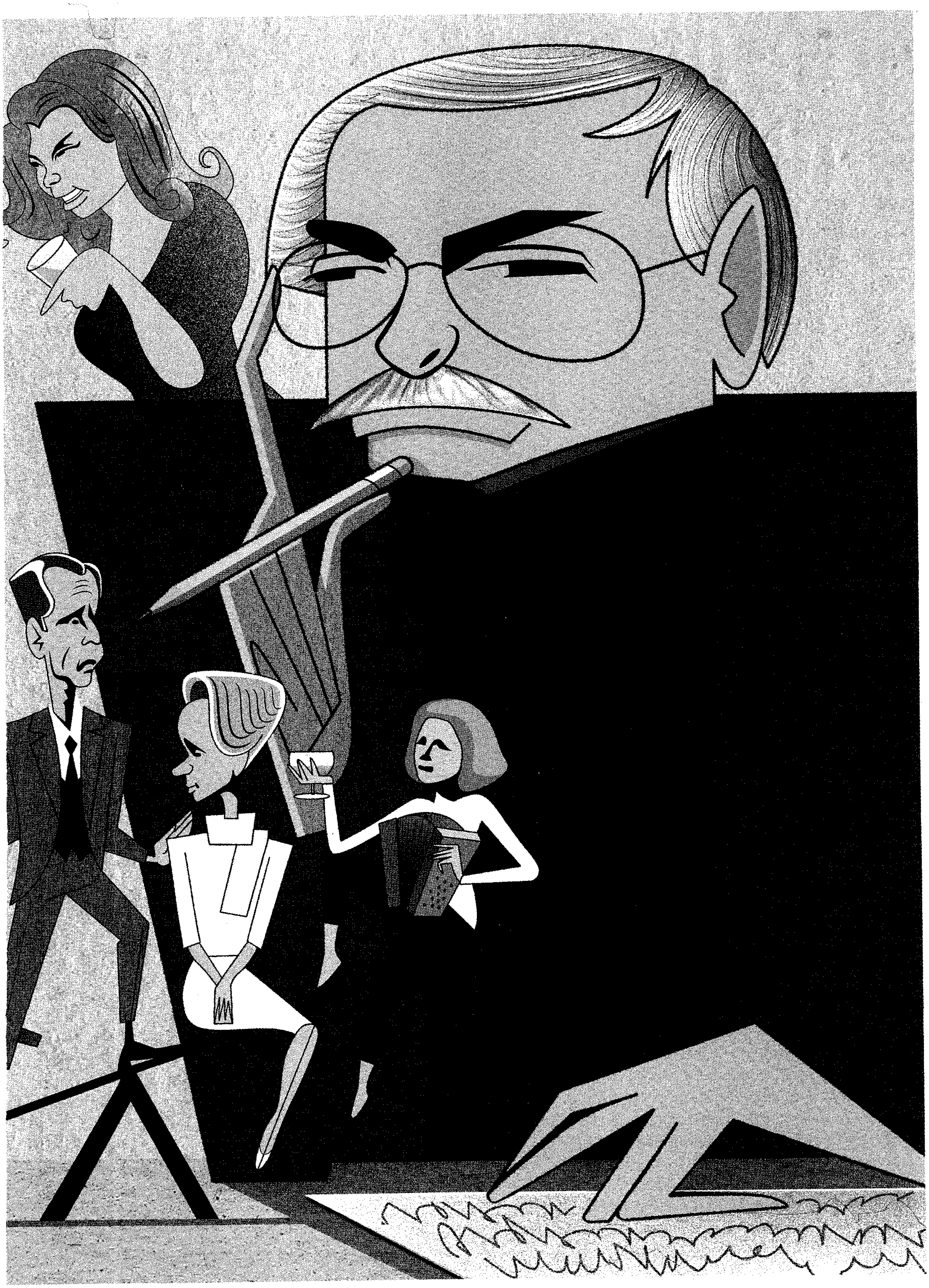
Edward Albee, the most important living American playwright, loves animals. He stops and chats with dogs he meets on the street. He likes to visit children's zoos where he can sit with animals close up and talk to them and play with them. He has always kept pets—chiefly cats and Irish wolfhounds. He claims that "Black Beauty" is one of his favorite movies. James Thurber, who wrote intimately about animals, is one of his favorite writers; another is A. A. Milne. "What do I love about 'Winnie-the-Pooh' and 'The House at Pooh Corner'?" Albee muses (a love from which, take note, he excludes Christopher Robin). "I think that these people have not been destroyed by anything. The purity of them. The fact that they're always going to be that way, and nice. They're forever good."

The animals that appear in Albee's plays are not forever good. They are not adorable or fluffy. But they have the animal quality of being thoroughly themselves. They are what they are, and humans feint and scheme around them. Albee's first play, which opened in 1959, a one-act called "The Zoo Story," centers on a narrative about a vicious dog and a man who tries to win him over, then tries to kill him, and then, having failed at both, resigns himself to a wary and cold détente. In Albee's 1966 play "A Delicate Balance," Tobias confesses that he had a pet cat killed at the vet's because it had started to dislike him. A character in the 1993 play "Fragments" relates how she decided to enlarge by several feet the grave she had dug for her dead dog because he had been frozen at the vet's and his tail was sticking straight out and she didn't want to snap it off (this actually happened to Albee and his late Irish wolfhound Harry).

Albee is perhaps the only playwright to write two leading roles for lizards. And it is no accident that it was he who came up with the brilliant idea to write a play about a man who has fallen in love with a goat. "I've never seen such an expression," Martin, the hero of his 2002 play "The Goat, or, Who Is Sylvia?," says of his caprine beloved. "It was pure . . . and trusting and . . . and innocent; so . . . so guileless." The poet and translator Richard Howard, who has known Albee since he was in his twenties, once wrote a poem about Albee and himself in which the Albee figure is named Feral. Albee's plays tend to cherish, in both their animal and their human protagonists, childlike, creaturely, feral qualities—authenticity, impulsiveness, imagination, openness to unconscious thoughts. Woe betide any character who displays adult human virtues such as rationality, courtesy, prudence, or restraint.

The play that made Albee famous, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," which opened in 1962 and is being revived on Broadway this month, is a carnival of wit in which George, a defeated middle-aged history professor, and his bitter, thwarted wife, Martha, use a young couple as foils for the dazzling cruelties they practice upon each other. Right from the start, the language is dense, complex, and spoken very fast; the cruelty is breathtaking, as is the amount of alcohol the characters consume; and all of this, combined with the play's length (nearly three hours) and the fact that it

Lavish praise for actors is not Albee's style. One actress says, "If you get a word from him, that's enough to live on. We are really the servants and he is the master."



ROBERT RISKO

"Call my attorney and ask him if he remembers that trick for getting out of handcuffs without a key."

never leaves the living room, produces a claustrophobia so intense as to be nearly unbearable. There is no relief, no light entry, no gentle fade-out—it is all second act. Whereas George and Martha are brutal and abandoned and, we are meant to see, truly in love, the young couple, an ambitious biology professor named Nick and his idiot wife, Honey, hold their marriage together with protective lies: Nick pretends to Honey that he loves her; Honey pretends to Nick that it is just bad luck that they have not yet had children. It is a measure of Albee's allegiance to feral behavior and feral people that, at the end of the long, harrowing night, it is George and Martha's marriage that is left standing.

Shortly before "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" was due to open in Boston, in February, Albee attended a rehearsal in New York. The rehearsal was to take place in a large room divided by tall screens; the front part of the space was set up as a sketchily furnished living room. Albee showed up early, but Elizabeth McCann, one of the play's producers, hadn't arrived by the time the rehearsal was to start, and this made Albee peevish. "There is no reason for anyone to ever be late," he muttered. He sat down on a metal folding chair and looked about. He splayed his fingers into an arch, fingertip to fingertip. He played with his mustache. He got up, walked over to the refreshment table, and helped himself to a cup of coffee and a couple of butter cookies.

Albee is slightly built and tends to stoop. He walks slowly, tipping forward, his hands hanging down. He is not graceful, but he is sure of himself. His hair is no longer heroically shaggy, as it was in the seventies and eighties, but it is unkempt enough to make his mustache look casual. His face is nearly always arranged in a neutral expression—the focussed blank of either irony or testiness.

As Albee sat drinking his coffee, Anthony Page, the director, approached him with a list of questions.

"Shall we turn this 'hump' into 'fuck'?" Page inquired. "It might be more cutting."

Page looks as though he were auditioning to play the part of a director. He is tall and has a neatly clipped white beard. When he is outdoors, he wears a tweed cap; when he is indoors he pushes his half-glasses up on top of his head.

"Let's try it," Albee said.

There was a history to this request. Albee agreed to tone down the play's language for the original production, replacing "shit" with "hell" or "crap" and "bullshit" with "nuts." When the play was revived in 1976, with Albee directing, he restored the original language, since the gentler version, by then, sounded sadly implausible.

Page decided to go ahead with the rehearsal without McCann, and Kathleen Turner and Bill Irwin, playing Martha and George, launched into their opening spat. Turner lurched about the stage, licking her lips in a disturbingly vulgar way that was very appropriate for Martha ("Poor Georgie-Porgie, put-upon pie! Awwwwww . . . what are you doing? Are you sulking?"). Irwin parried with delicate nastiness ("There aren't many more sickening sights than you with a couple of drinks in you and your skirt up over your head"). Neither of them quite knew the lines yet, and so there was a little improvising going on—indeed, to Albee's distress lines would still be forgotten at the Boston previews. Albee does not react well to actors improvising his lines. When someone got a word wrong, he corrected it under his breath. Every now and again, he clucked and shook his head irritably, and sometimes he threw up his hands in outrage. He scribbled notes in a small notebook. McCann showed up, wearing a sweatshirt that Albee had had made for her, which read, "I'm in the Theatre Hall of Fame. Are You?" She leaned over to one of the assistants on the production.

"Edward seems a little . . ." she began.

"Note-takey?" the woman suggested.

"Oh, he's always note-takey," McCann said.

Anthony Page, who is English, spent the first fifteen years of his career at the Royal Court Theatre, in London. The Royal Court specialized in new plays, and had a policy of never cutting or altering them; as a consequence it tended to attract the sort of director who was willing to submit his ego to that of the playwright. (A playwright will generally work with the director throughout the first production, and if the play is a success the playwright gets the credit. Directors who want to make a name for themselves as artists generally direct old plays: if an old play is a success, the director gets credit for whatever is inventive about the production.) Page is a product of his training. He considers working with a playwright to be a privilege, not a limitation, and he speaks of the writer with deference. "You disagree with him at your peril, because he can see much deeper into a play than you can," Page says. "It's actually a terrific relief to be told what the tones are. When you're floundering about wondering if you're doing it right, it just helps a lot to have the writer tell you." Albee, who trusts very few directors, trusts him.

Albee does not consider directors and actors to be creative artists. Their role, in his view, is a strictly interpretive one: they are there to realize the vision of the playwright. The theatre is not a democracy, and making people happy is not its mission: Albee will never compromise for the sake of social harmony. His vision is comprehensive. He knows exactly how each sentence should be enunciated—how loudly or softly, how quickly, how emphatically, at exactly what pitch and with what emotional coloring. He is reluctant to cut lines out of a play, and he will not tolerate an actor skipping a word or accidentally paraphrasing. "No one goes around messing with composers' work the way they do with plays," he says. "That's probably where I learned not to put up with that junk. Nobody takes three or four measures out of one of Bach's fugues."

Albee feels that a playwright should notate his writing with the same commanding precision as a composer notates his. To this end, he is extravagant with punctuation. (Even in his more naturalistic plays, his punctuation tends to be absurdist: he is fond of exclamation points, and even more fond of multiple exclamation points followed by multiple question marks.) His preoccupation with precision and control seems to have grown over the years. In his more recent plays, nearly every line has an instruction attached to it, such as these, for instance, from the first three pages of the 1991 "Three Tall Women": "*Small smile*"; "*Longer pause; none too pleasant*"; "*Pause; stretching*"; "*unconcerned*"; "*From a distance; curiously lighter, higher voice*"; "*Oddly loud, tough*"; "*A bit as if to a child*"; "*Quick smile*"; "*Dismissive laugh*"; "*Under her breath*"; "*Shakes her head in admiration*"; "*Ugly; suddenly*"; "*Tiny pause*"; "*Annoyance at herself*"; "*Placating*"; "*Small, smug triumph*"; "*Dogged, but not unpleasant*"; "*Weary*"; "*Clucks*"; "*Imitation*"; "*Purrs.*" Some instructions are so obvious that they seem almost paranoid: the line "What an answer! What a dumb . . ." carries the direction "*Scoffs.*"

It's not just lines that Albee likes to control—he is a theatre man, and he concerns himself with every aspect of the production, from props and staging to costumes and lights. The printed version of his 1980 play "The Lady from Dubuque" includes a costume list of extraordinary detail. For instance, for the character named Carol he prescribes "Violet pleated trousers; Magenta glitter sweater; Lavender high heel sandals; Lavender clutch bag; Striped violet and magenta organdy shirt (carried, not worn)." Albee observes theatrical protocol: he never gives notes to actors himself; he speaks only to the director. But he can be belligerent in defense of his prerogatives. "Frankly, he terrified me," Elizabeth McCann says of the first time they met. "He projects an image of a man who's totally self-sufficient. And I always feel like I'm about to make a terrible grammatical error."

Albee often directs his own plays, though actors can be reluctant to work with him: he can direct as though teaching cows to speak. Even when he is not directing, he is hardly a diplomat. At the first read-through of "The American Dream" (1961), Albee told its female star that her character was a "tumescent monster"; she quit the play that afternoon and refused even to take the director's phone calls. The actors in the film version of "A Delicate Balance" found Albee so intimidating that they begged him to stop visiting the set. ("It is indeed fortunate that the character of Agnes is very much like Katharine Hepburn," he observed afterward. "Of course, if she played King Kong it would still be Katharine Hepburn.") "Edward should direct the first version of his play somewhere like the English Theatre of Vienna, but somebody else should take it over," McCann says. "He doesn't really understand the actor's process."

Albee works best with actors who are humble but not needy. He doesn't like a lot of questions about who their characters are and what they're up to—he will say that the answers are in the play. Lavish praise, expected in the theatre, is not his style. "If you get a word from him, that's enough to live on," Marian Seldes, who has acted in many of Albee's plays and is also a friend, says. "We are really the servants and he is the master. The fact that you're you goes away and you become Edward's creature. I've always felt shy with him, because I don't want to waste his time."

How Albee came to be so self-possessed is a complicated story. He was adopted shortly after his birth, in 1928, by Reed and Frances Albee, a wealthy couple who lived in Larchmont, New York. The family money came from Reed's grandfather, who as a youth ran away to join the circus and ended up owning a chain of vaudeville theatres. Reed himself was an unimpressive figure with few interests, a passive, taciturn man with a glass eye who called his wife Mommy and spent much of his time in Manhattan having affairs with showgirls. Before she met Reed, Frances was a shopgirl from Jersey City, but she took to the life of a rich woman with ease—she dressed well and became an able horsewoman. She was six feet tall, cold and imposing. Each year, the family decamped to Palm Beach in two private railcars. The racial restrictions of Palm Beach suited the Albees, who, like everybody in Larchmont, refused to hire black servants. "They were even anti-Irish," Albee says. "That's carrying it pretty far."

Albee was pampered but unloved. He was sent away to boarding school and, in the summers, to camp. He responded by conceiving of himself as completely separate from his family: he became shy and secretive, and when he was told, at six or so, that he was adopted, he claims to have felt only relief. (Even now, Albee refers to his adoptive parents as "these people.") The persona that Albee came up with for himself was not one to invite intimacy. At seven, he walked around wearing a smoking jacket and carrying a cigarette holder. He was fat and autocratic. He called his Choate roommate Caliban.

Albee figured out that he was a writer when he was eight, and that he was gay when he was twelve. "I took to that like a duck to water!" he says. "One of the virtues of being away in private school." He wrote poetry and, at fourteen and sixteen, what he affectionately describes as possibly the two worst novels ever written. His poetry was not bad, he felt, but it was imitative rather than original. He was kicked out of two schools for failing to attend class, but he managed to graduate from Choate, and briefly attended Trinity College before being expelled for the usual reason. One morning soon afterward, following a fight with his parents about his coming home late, leaving the car covered in vomit, and failing to turn the lights off in the driveway, he left home in a taxi and never went back. When his father died, he didn't attend the funeral, and he didn't see his mother again for seventeen years.

When Albee left home, just after the war, he moved to Greenwich Village and fell in with a crowd that consisted mostly of composers. He began an affair with William Flanagan, a charismatic composer several years older than he was, and they lived together for seven years. The two of them drank a great deal and were famous for their malice and rage. "They would go to the Eighth Street bars and they would go to opposite ends of the bar," Ned Rorem told Albee's biographer Mel Gussow. "They were known as the Sisters Grimm because they wouldn't smile. They would sulk and they would swill down straight shots of whiskey with beer." "Edward was sour and mean, especially when he was drinking," Richard Howard says. "He was dark and passionate and difficult." When Howard first read the acid dialogue in "Virginia Woolf," it reminded him of fights between Albee and Flanagan and himself. "There was a lot of bickering about who was going to pay for what," he says. "And we all had this rivalry as to the people we'd pick up and sleep with. Edward was very attractive in those days. He was littler than the rest of us. He was like a small furry animal. After his success, he went to the gym and really buffed himself up, and we all made fun of him for that." Albee and Howard had a falling out in the late fifties but became friends again. "I think he learned that he was the person he wanted to be," Howard says. "He's become nicer and nicer. Now he's always extremely friendly and gracious and funny in a way that would have been inconceivable earlier on."

When he turned twenty-one, Albee came into a small trust fund from his grandmother, and he supplemented it with various odd jobs. He worked as a messenger boy for Western Union, as a salesman at Bloomingdale's, as an office boy at an ad agency, and at the luncheonette counter of the Manhattan Towers Hotel. He went out all the time. "I saw all the happenings, all the small theatre productions, all the early exhibitions of the Abstract Expressionists," he says. "I went to every poetry reading, all the concerts of avant-garde music, all the dance companies. Everyone did all that stuff. We were absorbing what was exciting and best in our culture as naturally as breathing. That's not as easy now. It's partly the expense, but there's something else that's getting in the way. I don't know what it is. It's all becoming so self-conscious for people. It's not as natural as breathing anymore."

"I just want to go home, crawl into bed, and do some more work."

It was ten years after he left home and moved to the city that Albee wrote the play that started his career—ten years during which he was consorting with all sorts of accomplished people. But, he says, he never doubted himself, never felt like a hanger-on or worried that he would fail. Once, visiting Flanagan at the MacDowell Colony, he met Thornton Wilder and showed him a few poems. Wilder suggested that he try writing plays. Albee wasn't insulted—he simply took the suggestion at face value. He was confident that one day he would write something extraordinary; so when "The Zoo Story" suddenly popped out of him, in the course of three weeks in the winter of 1958, he was neither elated nor surprised.

"Zoo Story" involves an encounter around a park bench between Jerry, an eccentric who lives in an insalubrious boarding house, and Peter, a perfectly nice, dull middle-class man. Jerry needles Peter, goading him out of his sense that his life is perfectly fine. At the play's climax, Jerry, having picked a fight, impales himself on a knife that Peter is holding, leaving Peter shocked and, presumably, changed forever. This ending is not nearly so startling, though, as the lurid, pungent images that Jerry hurls at Peter throughout the play:

> Jerry: [My] landlady is a fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage. And you may have noticed that I very seldom use profanity, so I can't describe her as well as I might.
>
> Peter: You describe her ... vividly.
>
> Jerry: Well, thanks. Anyway . . . somewhere, somewhere in the back of that pea-sized brain of hers, an organ developed just enough to let her eat, drink, and emit, she has some foul parody of sexual desire. And I, Peter, I am the object of her sweaty lust.
>
> Peter: That's disgusting. That's . . . horrible.
>
> Jerry: But I have found a way to keep her off. . . . I merely say: but, Love; wasn't yesterday enough for you, and the day before? Then she puzzles, she makes slits of her tiny eyes, she sways a little, and then, Peter . . . a simple-minded smile begins to form on her unthinkable face, and she giggles and groans as she . . . relives what never happened.

"Zoo Story" had an enormous influence on younger writers. "Theatre for years became littered with park benches," John Guare wrote. "To show you were avant-garde, you needed no more than a dark room and a park bench." The play was followed, in 1960, by an uncharacteristically didactic race drama, "The Death of Bessie Smith," and "The Sandbox," of which Albee is especially fond—a fourteen-minute one-act in which a perky old woman, Grandma, dies in a sandbox, attended by an endearingly clumsy young man who turns out to be the Angel of Death. The play manages to be at once lightly comic and oddly terrifying:

> YOUNG MAN: Uh . . . ma'am; I . . . I have a line here.
>
> GRANDMA: Oh, I'm sorry, sweetie; you go right ahead. . . .
>
> YOUNG MAN: (*Prepares; delivers the line like a real amateur*) I am the Angel of Death. I am uh . . . I am come for you.
>
> GRANDMA: What . . . wha . . . (*Then, with resignation*) . . . ohhhh . . . ohhhh . . . I see.
>
> (*The* YOUNG MAN *bends over, kisses* GRANDMA *gently on the forehead*)

As these plays were being produced, Albee was talked about as part of the theatre of the absurd; he was said to be the first playwright to bring this European sensibility—epitomized by playwrights such as Beckett, Pinter, and Ionesco—to America. Albee encouraged this association—the first scene of "The American Dream" is a virtual rewriting of the first scene of Ionesco's "The Bald Soprano." Martin Esslin, in his 1961 book "The Theatre of the Absurd," which popularized the term, defined it as theatre after the death of God: theatre that attempts to convey the situation of mankind in a universe without meaning. To Esslin, absurdist theatre was vital because, by confronting its audience with an existential vision, it forced the audience to experience and come to terms with frightening reality. It represented, in that sense, a return to the original function of theatre as a form of religious ritual. But not all absurdist theatre was of this type: in his view, there was another sort of absurdism that was satirical rather than ritualistic—the absurdism of Ionesco rather than of Beckett, which concerned itself with parodying the pettiness of society rather than with dramatizing the void. More often than not, Albee's plays belong to this second category. In his work, meaninglessness appears less as a quality of the universe, a primary fact of the human condition, than as a personality flaw for which particular benighted people can be blamed and mocked.

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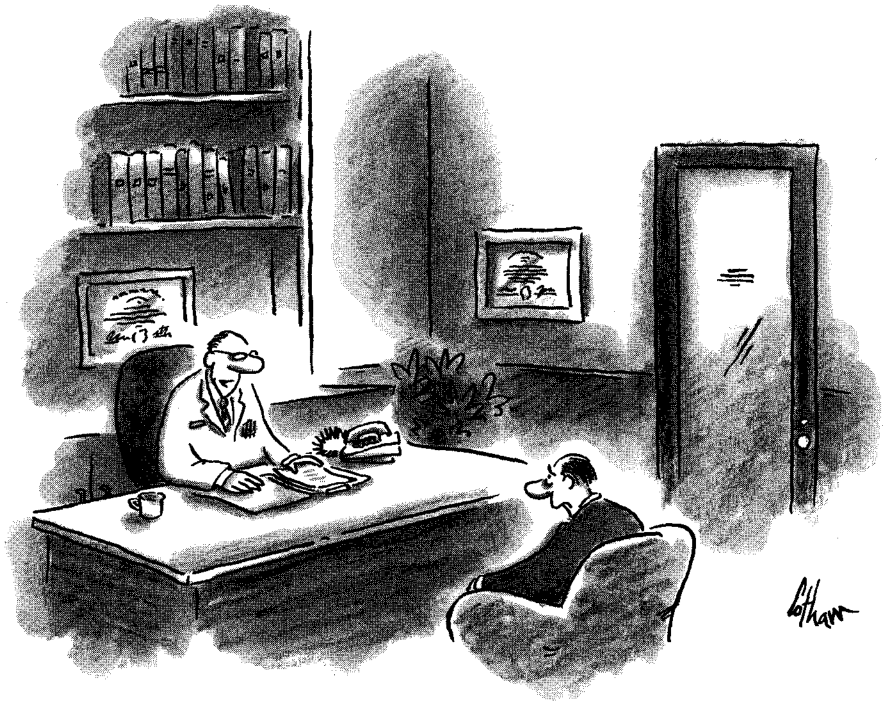
If there is a single theme that runs through Albee's work, it is the importance of being open to a full consciousness of life, with all the social and emotional risk that that entails. "Dangerous" is one of his highest terms of praise, and "restful" is one of his worst insults. Albee defines himself against the O'Neill of "The Iceman Cometh," who suggests that people cannot survive without the comfort of their delusions. In "The Iceman Cometh," the truthteller who, with the best intentions, strips a group of failures and drunkards of their fantasies turns out to be the most destructively deluded character of them all. In Albee plays, though, truthtellers are brave and wise, and the damage they do is all to the good. Jerry, in "The Zoo Story," tells Peter that his life is dull and limited; George, in "Virginia Woolf," forces his wife to give up her fantasy that she has a child; Man and Woman, in "The Play About the Baby," destroy Girl and Boy's fantasy that they have a baby; Tobias, in "A Delicate Balance," tells his best friend that he doesn't love him; the Wife, in "All Over," tells her children she doesn't love them; Cordelia, in "Finding the Sun," tells Abigail that her husband doesn't love her; A and B, in "Three Tall Women," tell C that she will not marry for love. "If you have no wounds how can you know if you're alive?" says the Man in "The Play About the Baby." "If you have no scar how do you know who you are?" It is not surprising that a man who has never experienced self-doubt has no respect for comfort or compromise or safety.

Albee himself used to be a notorious truthteller, during the decade or so, from the late sixties to the late seventies, when he was drinking. He abused people at dinner parties. One time, he and a friend walked out of a play in the middle of an act, shouting insults at the cast. "When I was drinking, I would feel the need to set people straight," he told Gussow. "I knew what phonies they were, what duplicity and hypocrisy I saw. . . . I felt the need to expose people to the world for who they really were. I did not want to let them get away with anything anymore, even if that demanded embarrassing or humiliating them. I was a scourge."

While Albee was drinking, he lost control of his finances and found himself deeply in debt. He even lost control of his work—sometimes he would write lines and not know what they meant. His life was saved, he says, by Jonathan Thomas—a sculptor and painter whom he met in 1971 at the University of Toronto, when Thomas was twenty-four and Albee was forty-three. Albee decided to stop drinking and smoking at the same time. He didn't go to A.A.—he



"Well, now that you have it, you can stop worrying about getting it."

did it on his own, with the help of Antabuse, a drug that, if taken in combination with alcohol, makes you sick. "I have will," he says.

Albee and Thomas are still together. People who don't know Albee well are often surprised by his devotion. It is a side of him that is not always apparent. "I have this list of people I call every Christmas to see how they are," he says. "And people have told me that they're startled and happy that I seem to care. Maybe I give the impression of being aloof and distant. I'm private." Albee is known primarily as a writer of brutal intra-familial wars or detached absurdism, but he has also created plays that are wonderfully moving, and characters who love each other. "Seascape" involves two affectionate couples—one human, one reptile. "Counting the Ways," a beautifully wrought series of vaudeville-style short takes separated by blackouts, consists of conversations between a husband and wife about their love. In "The Goat," Martin is not only in love with the goat, Sylvia—he is also in love with his wife, and runs into trouble because he actually expects her to understand his situation. The problem with marriages in Albee plays is usually not that the husband and wife are at odds but that they are too little at odds—with the result that, over years, they build themselves a reassuring cage of habits and understandings and forget how to be alive.

Albee and Thomas live in a large loft on Harrison Street in Tribeca that Albee bought for a song thirty years ago, and that now looks like an industrial-style gallery: the floors are crowded with sculpture and the exposed-brick walls with paintings (twentieth-century abstract, with the exception of a couple of portraits, including one by Chagall of his sister), which Albee periodically rearranges to refresh his perceptions. (Albee is serious about contemporary art and has curated several shows.) Many of the sculptures are traditional African artifacts, including a large, magnificent wood head of a horned beast that stands on a side table and whose wide nose Albee caresses when he sits nearby.

Albee's reputation has been more unstable than that of perhaps any other playwright of his stature. "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" made so much money that Albee bought a house and an old barn in Montauk, at the tip of Long Island, started a foundation to benefit young artists, and began amassing his art collection. But there was a period of about fifteen bad years in the middle of his career, from the mid-seventies until the early nineties, when he was persona non grata on Broadway.

Even at the height of his early popularity, in the nineteen-sixties, he had had his ups and downs. His 1964 play "Tiny Alice," for instance—the labored saga of a sexually repressed and religiously obsessive young lay brother who is prostituted by the Church to a mysterious rich woman and ultimately martyred—was derided as pompous and baffling to such a degree that Albee felt obliged to hold a press conference to try to explain it. (He did not succeed.) "Its tediousness, its pretentiousness, its galling sophistication, its gratuitous and easy symbolizing, its ghastly pansy rhetoric and repartee," an enraged Philip Roth wrote in *The New York Review of Books*. " 'Tiny Alice' is so unconvincing, so remote, so obviously a sham—so much the kind of play that makes you want to rise from your seat and shout, 'Baloney.' " The play's star, John Gielgud, was so bewildered by it that he threatened to quit almost daily, implored Albee to cut down his nine-minute dying monologue because he had no idea what he was talking about, and had to be sustained by brandy. (At this point, even Albee doesn't much care for the play.)

"Tiny Alice" was chum to the press. "A Delicate Balance," produced in 1966, won a Pulitzer, and "Seascape" won him a second Pulitzer, in 1975, but he had more flops than hits. "A Delicate Balance" was followed, in 1968, by the paired plays "Box" and "Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung," an unsuccessful experiment in verbal polyphony—three characters and one disembodied voice take turns telling a story, reciting an amusingly bad nineteenth-century poem, and declaiming the sayings of Chairman Mao. Between 1963 and 1981, Albee wrote a series of adaptations for the stage—of Carson McCullers's "The Ballad of the Sad Café" and Nabokov's "Lolita," among others—none of which really worked. (Noël Coward was a great fan of Albee's, but when Albee took him to see "The Ballad of the Sad Café" Coward sighed loudly throughout the performance and told him at the end, "Dear boy, this is not my kind of play.") Albee was, bizarrely, asked by the producer David Merrick to rewrite the book for a stage-musical version of "Breakfast at Tiffany's": at the first preview, as Albee put it, an "incredible wave of loathing came across the footlights," and he managed, as he said later, "in only two weeks, to turn something that would have been a six-month mediocrity into an instant disaster."

"The Man Who Had Three Arms"—a play that Albee wrote in the early eighties about a man who grows a third arm, becomes a celebrity, and then turns bitter when the arm disappears and he finds he is no longer desirable—was probably the nadir of his career. "You owe me something, you people!" cries the man. "You loved me in the good times, and you're fucking well going to love me now!!" The play itself is actually quite funny, in the tradition of Gogol's "The Nose," but inevitably it was interpreted by the critics as a bratty protesting of his treatment at their hands. The *Times* called it "a temper tantrum in two acts." Things got so bad that, when Albee first started showing people "Three Tall Women," which later became a big hit and won him his third Pulitzer Prize, nobody in New York wanted anything to do with it. It was produced first in Austria, and then by a small repertory company upstate, and only made it to an Off Broadway theatre several years later. "Three Tall Women" involves a conversation between three characters, A, B, and C, who are closely based on Albee's mother at three different ages: ninety-two (A), fifty-two (B), and twenty-six (C). As much as it says about Albee's caustic, unsentimental mother, the play is also about times of life: the way that certainties grow flaccid and doubts hard; the difference between the cruelty of the old and the cruelty of the young.

In 1965, in the middle of the "Tiny Alice" fiasco, Albee received a phone call from his parents' secretary telling him that his mother was ill and lonely. (His father had died four years earlier.) He went to see her, for the first time since he left home. "I hear his voice and it all floods back, but I'm formal," A, in "Three Tall Women," says of this meeting. "Well, hello there, I say. Hello there to you, he says. Nothing about this shouldn't have happened. Nothing about I've missed you, not even that little lie. . . . There are no apologies, no recriminations, no tears, no hugs; dry lips on my dry cheeks; yes that. And we never discuss it? Never go into why? . . . We're strangers; we're curious about each other; we leave it at that." They then saw each other regularly: she would attend his opening nights and dinner parties at his apartment; he joined her on trips to Palm Beach. Because she couldn't tolerate homosexuality, Albee often sent his partner out of the house when she came for dinner. One evening, at a party he was giving at his loft, a tall older woman walked up to him as he was talking to two friends. He turned to introduce her to them but couldn't quite place her and couldn't remember her name. Luckily the friends knew that she was his mother.

Albee is a proudly unreconstructed old lefty—an enemy to Republicans (for a revival of "A Delicate Balance" he changed a line from "Republicans, as dull as ever" to "Republicans, as brutal as ever") who is appalled by the prospect of President Bush dismantling the New Deal. He believes that "if we lived in a utopian society there would be no need for art, because the function of art is to make people better." He talks in dire tones about commercialism and how it is ruining theatre, now more than ever, and how young playwrights must be strong enough to resist compromise. He did, it's true, once accept ten thousand pounds from Volvo to write a short story to be used in an advertising campaign, but he purposely wrote a story that was so hilariously dreadful that Volvo declined to use it.

In his struggle to save serious theatre from commerce, there is little that Albee is unwilling to do. At the artists' residency program that he sponsors near his house in Montauk, one of the requirements is poverty. He is a zealous member of the Dramatists Guild, the playwright's equivalent of a union. But in the long run, he knows, it is more effective to convert playwrights to seriousness when they are young and uncorrupted. Thus, for fifteen years he taught a playwriting course at the University of Houston. And it was for this reason that, one chilly evening just before Christmas, he donned a large yellow slicker and made his way through the snow to the Cherry Lane Theatre, in the West Village.

On the second floor above the theatre, seated around a long table in a low-ceilinged room, were three young playwrights who had been selected by the Cherry Lane for an Albee workshop. Courtney, a Texan with a round, cheerful face, had written a play about a woman who finds herself drawn to a doctor who has failed to save her baby from dying. The woman and her husband were based on Courtney and her husband, Courtney said, but whether the story was also taken from life she didn't say. Albee liked the play but had found it irritating that, for all the scenes of romantic tension between the woman and the doctor, it was never made clear whether the two of them had done anything more interesting together than stare at each other over lunch.

"Here's where I become annoyed with this play," Albee said. "You seem to be avoiding specific yeses and nos. There are certain things we have to know. Is there a sexual relationship? Do they go to bed?"

"I don't know," Courtney admitted.

"Come on, you have to know! No author can say that."

"I don't know!"

"You have to know," he told her. "How can you write your characters if you don't know what happened to them? I think there's an avoidance here. Either it's an avoidance or you really don't know, and if so you'd better find out before you put the play on."

"I know I need to decide," Courtney said. "But when I think about it I start blushing because it makes me so nervous."

"Well, of course, since you said this is about your own relationship, you know the answer," Albee said, and smiled.

The next play depicted the sexual awakening of a shy, dutiful Indian college student. In one scene, the student pretends to be a pizza deliveryman in order to escape a beating at the hands of a black fraternity brother who is more sexually awake than strictly necessary. In the course of the scene, the fraternity brother demonstrates to the student how one ass-waxes a woman. There was, however, no description in the manuscript of what this demonstration entailed, and Albee had been mystified. He applied to Rajiv, the play's author, for assistance.

"Will everyone in the audience except me know what ass-waxing is?" he asked. "It's mentioned several times."

"It is, yes," Rajiv agreed. Rajiv, who looked as though he might recently have been a shy, dutiful Indian college student himself, did not look comfortable with the topic.

"If I were watching this play, I'd keep turning to whoever was sitting next to me in the theatre and whispering, *What is ass-waxing*?" Albee told him. "What *is* ass-waxing, by the way?"

"What is ass-waxing?" Rajiv repeated.

"Yes."

"Well, it's funny," Rajiv said, "because I've had two productions of this play and both Torrys"—Torry was the fraternity brother—"had different interpretations of what ass-waxing was."

Albee was not interested, however, in this attempt to evade the issue.

"You tell me what it is," he said. "Is it a physical act?"

"Yes, it is."

"Describe it!"

"It is the act of, as if you were waxing a car, only you're waxing an ass."

"What do you use?"

"Your hand."

"But when you're waxing a car you also use something else," Albee objected.

"Well, you have a rag," Rajiv concurred. "But you wouldn't necessarily need a rag for ass-waxing."

"What would you have on the hand?"

"You wouldn't have anything on the hand."

"So why is it called waxing if there's no wax?"

"I think it's the motion," Rajiv said desperately. "And the idea behind it. It's a kind of buffing up."

"Now, you see?" Albee said, relenting. "Ass-waxing has taken me out of the play for ten minutes."

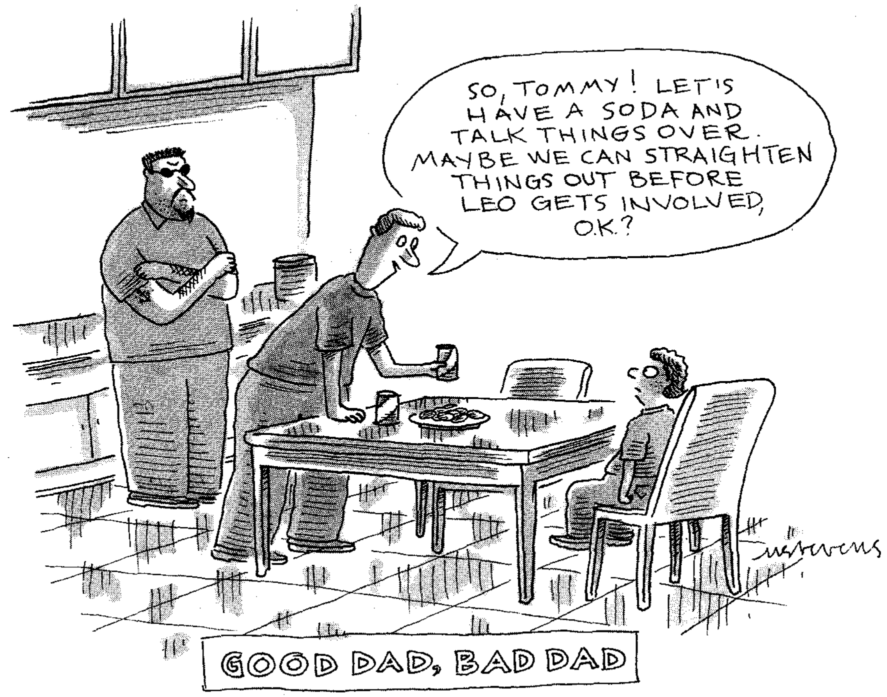
Sam, the other playwright, wore a blue shirt and a dark woollen blazer of a complex design. He had written a play set in the nineteen-fifties about a Jewish man who tries to get into a Christians-only country club. It was a peculiar play for a young man to have written—it read like a period piece.

"There are too many short sentences in this play," Albee said. "Whole scenes go by where there is not one speech longer than a line. There's nothing wrong with that if it works, but the fact that I noticed it is a sign that other things should be happening."

"I definitely don't want that," Sam said. "I've seen a lot of plays with these very clipped rhythms."

"People that are lesser Mamets write like that," observed one of the Cherry Lane people.

"The lesser Mamets," Albee mused.


SO, TOMMY! LET'S HAVE A SODA AND TALK THINGS OVER. MAYBE WE CAN STRAIGHTEN THINGS OUT BEFORE LEO GETS INVOLVED, O.K.?
GOOD DAD, BAD DAD

"Reminds me of a set of islands in the Caribbean."

Albee is an acute detector of other people's tics, but of course he has tics of his own. His characters are always correcting each other's grammar or word usage at unlikely moments—in the middle of emotionally damaging arguments, for instance. They talk in baby talk or Southern accents when they mean to be sarcastic. They wryly characterize their own statements ("he chirped," "she mimicked"). And they are perpetually misunderstanding or mishearing each other in the most improbable ways. Sometimes these misunderstandings serve the wrong-noun joke formula, as in this exchange from "The Goat":

> Ross: Hello there, old man!
> Martin: I'm fifty!
> Ross: It's a term of endearment. Nice flowers.
> Martin: It is?
> Ross: What? What is?
> Martin: "Hello there, old man." Ranunculi.
> Ross: Pardon?
> Martin: ... the flowers.

But often a character will ask another what he is talking about when only narcolepsy could explain the confusion. "What?" (or, rather, "What??!!") must be the most common locution in the Albee canon.

Writerly tics were not, however, Albee's main concern. "There are two ways plays get written," he said. "One is 'I've got an idea, now I've got to find a situation that will encompass the idea.' Those tend to be didactic plays. The other kind is what I laughingly call, about my own process, 'I write my plays to find out why I'm writing them.' I'm not saying that one is preferable, necessarily, but I suspect that Ibsen and Arthur Miller did the first and Chekhov and Tennessee did the second."

Albee turned to Sam.

"Did you feel at any point in the writing of this play that the characters wanted to do stuff that you had not put them in the play to do?" he asked in a severe tone.

"I did, actually," Sam said defensively.

"Do you know what they look like?"

"I have a sense."

"Do you know the sound of their voices? Do you know how they smell? Do you know how they use their eyes? How they sit, how they stand? Do you

"I see you brought the pie charts."

• •

know them as three-dimensional people?"

"Yes."

"O.K."

It was characteristic of Albee to identify the trouble with a play as a matter of process rather than of plot. Most people from time to time become aware that an idea has popped into their heads, seemingly from nowhere. For Albee, though, this is the central experience of his imaginative life. He never tries consciously to invent a plot or characters, nor does he find himself thinking, as a result of some inspiring encounter, Now, that would be a good idea for a play. Rather, one day he will discover that, without quite knowing it, he has been thinking about a new idea for some time—the idea has been germinating somewhere inside him and has developed without his help. When the idea presents itself to him, he will turn it over in his mind once or twice, and think, Isn't that interesting; and then he will push it back down whence it came, to let it grow and ripen. He will not make a note of it. This process can go on for years. Often, it is two or three years before he will write anything down.

If Albee feels that an idea is approaching maturity, he will test it: he will go for a long walk, often on the beach, and introduce his characters to a situation that is not part of the play. If they behave easily and naturally—if he is able to improvise dialogue for them without effort—then he will decide that he and they know each other well enough, and he will start to write. Once he has started writing, he will write one draft, read it over, make corrections, and write out a second. Then he is finished. Very occasionally, he will make further alterations once he sees how a play is working or not working in rehearsal. (After watching the first run-through of his 1975 play "Seascape," he went home and cut out the entire second act.) But usually, once he has completed his second draft, that's it.

Albee feels that his imaginative powers come from his unconscious, and that they must be protected from consciousness lest they wither and harden, like underwater plants exposed to air. He dislikes explaining his writing process or the origin of his ideas, even to himself. "I don't consider myself an intellectual," he says. "I'm not sure that I think coherently terribly well." He defers to his unconscious in most things, because it knows more than he does. He has a terrible memory, he says, but he finds that his characters can quote whole passages from books he can't remember having read. "You mustn't write the three-page précis of what the play's going to be about and what's going to happen in each scene," he says, "because you're going to find that your characters have their own ideas about it. You've thought about what you're doing a lot more than you're aware that you have; so if you're tempted to say, 'That's not what I meant,' be careful—because it may be what you meant."

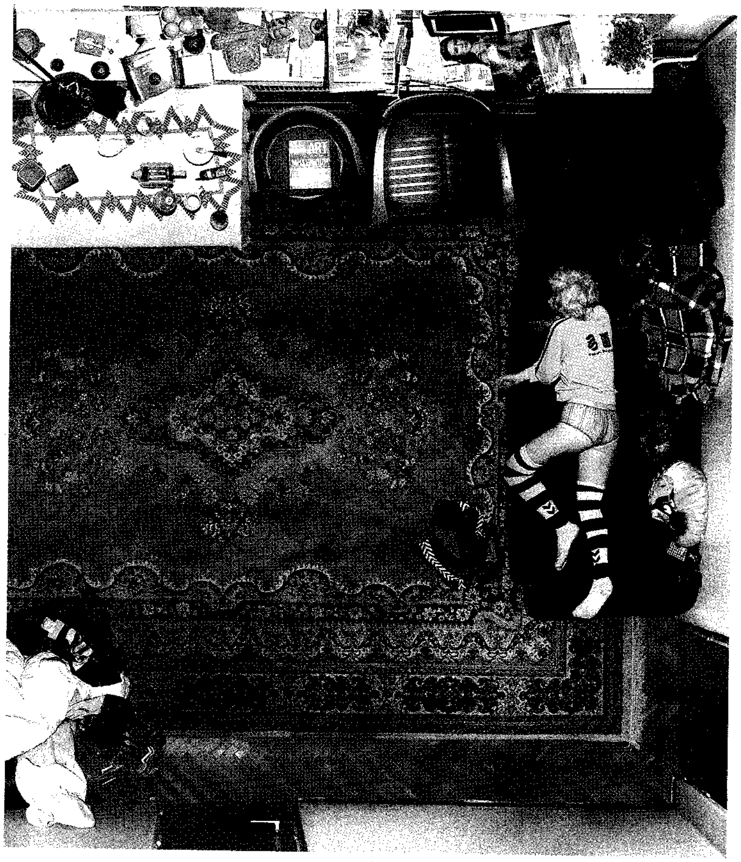
Albee holds it a principle never to rewrite a play once he has lost the state of mind in which he wrote it, because he feels as though it had been written by somebody else. He doesn't stick quite so rigidly to this principle as he claims. He cut a large chunk out of Jerry's dying speech in "The Zoo Story" some thirty years after he wrote the play, for instance, feeling that a man discoursing for several pages with a knife in his chest was too operatic for his taste at that point. For this production of "Virginia Woolf," he made a very significant change: he removed the implication that George had accidentally killed both his parents, feeling that that distracted from what had really ruined his life—his failure to stand up to his father-in-law. But those are rare exceptions. "I think it would be dishonest to what caused the play," he says. "I wouldn't let anyone else rewrite it, why let me?" Albee, in other words, is not only protective of the unconscious as the source of his livelihood; he defers to it, and respects its territory. An unconscious has its own ways and moods and thoughts, he feels, and they should be respected by its host. Albee is a union man. The unconscious does work; therefore the unconscious has rights.

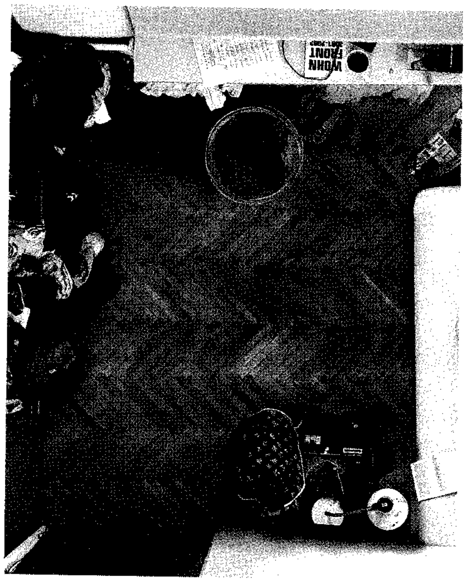
Albee is doubly removed from a sense of rootedness: he was adopted, and then he rejected his adoptive family. Since he was about six or seven, he has felt that he invented himself. Perhaps this is why he is so attached to the idea of his unconscious: it is the part of him that he feels is given, that has always been part of him, that he has no power to control. It is, in a way, his biology. "I've had plenty of opportunity to find out who my natural parents were," Albee says. "The fact that I haven't bothered indicates to me that I don't want to go to the trouble. I know who I am. Once I figured out who I was, whatever care or interest I may have had in where I came from vanished completely—I was indifferent to my past." ♦

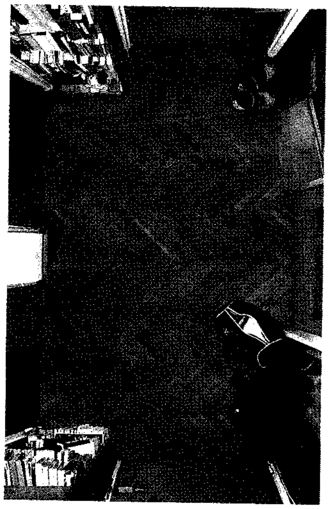
FICTION

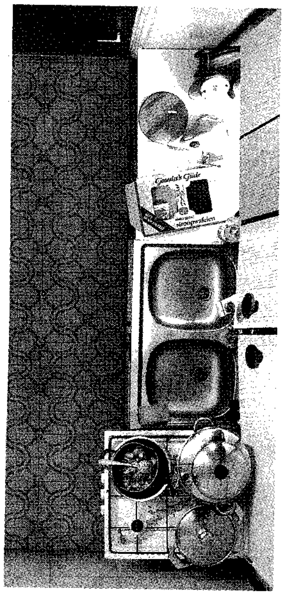
SOLACE

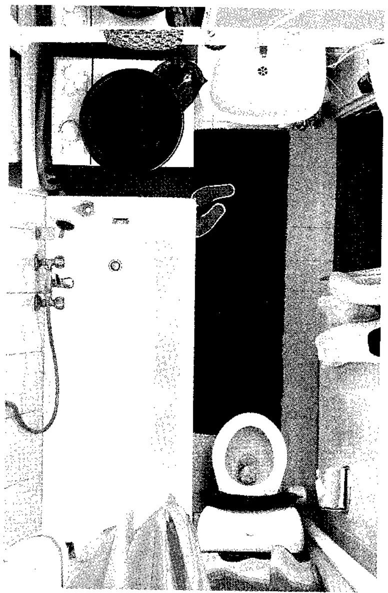
BY DONALD ANTRIM











They were children of parents who'd acted grotesquely, some might say violently, toward them, even when they were fairly little, and when, in their early thirties, they met and began sharing confidences, their discovery of this common ground—for that was how she thought of it—seemed to her a great, welcome solace. At last! she thought more than once during the weeks and months after they'd started going to bed together—always at friends' places, because they were both in transitional periods and didn't have anywhere comfortably private; she was saving money by sleeping on a foldout sofa in the living room of a one-bedroom apartment in the East Twenties that she shared with her friend Susan, while he, also recently forced to cut expenses, was installed uptown in a rented room in the apartment of an older, intimidating former co-worker, also named Susan. At *last!* Jennifer said to herself many times before falling asleep after sex in some friend's or friend of a friend's freshly changed bed. Then she would squeeze his hand.

One morning after this way of life had been going on for a while—it was the day after the summer solstice, and they were occupying their sixth or seventh borrowed apartment, getting away from their Susans for the weekend—Christopher woke early. He pushed back the sheet and the thin bedspread, rolled off the strange mattress, and, leaving her sleeping, went searching for coffee in Bert and Lucie's kitchen. He moved down the line of melamine cabinets, opening and shutting the white doors. The open, uncurtained kitchen window gave him a view of a treeless back courtyard and neighbors' windows directly opposite. There was no breeze. Living without air-conditioning or blinds was, Christopher thought, exactly the kind of thing his friends Bert and Lucie would do; it was a statement about iconoclasm or freedom or hedonism, and there was more evidence of it, the ambiguous statement, everywhere in the apartment—in the preponderance of tacky objects from the nineteen-sixties and seventies, in the bright upholstery colors on the couch and podlike chairs, in the large fish tank inhabited by a piranha.

Christopher put water on the stove and turned on the burner. There, on the counter beside the refrigerator, was the gin bottle. But where was the coffee? He was naked.

They'd met at the end of the previous winter, at a dinner party thrown by a movie producer for whom Christopher had once done some legal work. The producer's husband had been seated directly across the table from Christopher, and on the husband's right was Jennifer. Shortly after the halibut came out, Christopher remembered, this man had dropped his napkin on the floor beside her chair, then boldly leaned into her space to reach for it. As he reached down, his forehead bumped the side of her left breast. And that wasn't all. Coming up after grabbing the napkin, the husband, in a show of spatial awareness or perhaps a feigned considerateness, moved backward to avoid a second contact. Instead of sitting straight in his seat, however, he paused, his body bent awkwardly over, his face close to the breast, which he gazed at, it seemed to Christopher, with intensity. In a mock-formal voice, addressing the breast, the husband growled, "Pardon," then sat upright and laughed, forcing Jennifer to grimace out at the table as she shared the joke. But what was the joke?

"You're Charlie Harrison's friend!" she shouted at Christopher before coffee was served, before they pushed back their chairs and wandered off to find privacy—the sloppiness of the people around them making it possible for them to seek refuge with each other—in a bedroom.

"Charlie," he said, and finished chewing. Then he thought: Christ, why bring that up?

Down the table, a man who'd drunk too much knocked his glass across a plate, and there was a commotion.

"You've got to speak up!" she called over the noise. "I can't hear a word you're saying!"

"How do you know Charlie?" he asked loudly, and she yelled back, "I wouldn't say I *know* him!"

"I don't, either! I mean, I don't *not* know him! I *know* him"—gathering steam—"but, well, not *well*, anymore. I *knew* him!" What was he doing? Why was he blurting?

"I understand! I understand completely!" she shouted at him. "Here's to *old acquaintances!*" She leaned over her plate, raised her glass in her hand, and, in a softer voice, told him, "My name's Jennifer."

Was she making a toast? He had nothing in his glass but water. It occurred to him that she'd maybe had a bad experience with his ex-friend, that she and Charlie had possibly slept together. He tilted himself forward to meet her halfway. A candle burned between them, and he moved it aside. Her eyes were brown and somewhat cloudy; he made a point of looking into them when he said, "It's bad luck to toast with water."

"We don't want bad luck."

So he picked up a wineglass from among the scattered dishes, one that had been filled but seemed not to belong to anyone, and raised it to his mouth and took a quick fake drink, even that a violation of the major rule he lived by, the rule he tried not to violate too often or—since most nights he was, after all, likely to break down—too early in the evening. But it wasn't early in the evening, was it?

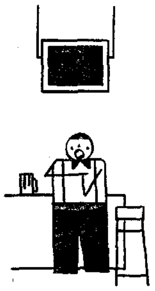
"For luck," he said.

Later, sitting next to him on a bed, atop partygoers' mixed-up coats, scarves, and hats, she told him that she'd worked in the film business for six years but hadn't felt at home, that she'd wanted all along to paint. Her mother painted but had never made a career of it, though who knew what might have happened were it not for her mother's drinking and drugging. Those were Jennifer's words: drinking and drugging. She told him she felt sure that as a very young girl she'd probably been happy, but because of things that had happened when she was a bit older in her childhood, things that had influenced every aspect of her existence—did he follow her meaning?—those sweeter memories, whatever they might have been, were no longer playing. Her current project was self-acceptance, not an uncommon goal, she said, among the sorts of people she mainly hung out with, people who'd moved to the city from distant places because, as she put it, "they had no homes in their home towns."

That last line sounded like something she'd said before, on more than one occasion. Nonetheless, her words were a mini-revelation to him. She'd expressed a condition that he'd known in life yet had been unable to articulate until it was

DETAIL: ANETA GRZESZYKOWSKA & JAN SMAGA, "WOLSKA 115A/32" (2003)/ROBERT MANN GALLERY

figured forth concretely by her, in speech that sounded canned. "I'm enjoying myself," he told her, and she said, "I'm having a nice time, too. I'm glad I came tonight," and went on to tell him how much her painting meant to her—so much that it frightened her sometimes—even though she was only a beginner. She was interested in realism, she said. This was one area in which she differed from her mother, who, she confided to Christopher in a low whisper, was an Abstract Expressionist; and—she was getting excited again—the fact of her mother's frustrated ambition obviously had everything to do with the anxieties that she, Jennifer, felt whenever she picked up a paintbrush. Breathlessly, she told him, "I need to make painting mine."



"How about you?" she asked.

"Me?"

"Yes," flirting. "You."

"I'm not an artist."

He paused. She waited. Finally, he said, "I used to scribble a few lines in college. Poetry. Does that count?"

"Count? What do you mean, count?" She laughed, and he said, "Oh, I just, I guess, I don't know," and then, against his will, he was laughing with her, because what else could he do? He gazed at the side of her face, wondering, absurdly, whether he would like what he saw—what he would see—as the years rolled by and she and he got older. Her nose, it seemed to him, was on the small side in relation to her wide mouth. Makeup did not completely conceal a slight dryness to her skin, and her hair, pulled tightly back, gave her forehead a stretched appearance—would she look less startled without the ponytail? And yet she was attractive in a prim, smart way that he found sexy. And who was he to find fault, he with his thin upper lip and his jutting ears?

After they'd stayed a while longer in their hosts' bedroom, she exclaimed, "I have to go now!" and leaped up and tugged her coat and scarf from the loose pile—he was forced to scramble when other guests' clothes began shifting beneath him. Would he walk her out? In fact, would he mind saying goodbye to the others for her? Yes, he assured her, he'd be happy to. Where were her gloves, though? she wanted to know. "Did you check in your coat? Are the gloves in a pocket? Are there pockets in the lining? Could the gloves be in the lining?" he asked. But they weren't there. Nor were they under the bed. "They'll turn up," she announced as she marched out of the bedroom. They sneaked past the clamorous guests in the dining room. "Sh-h-h," he whispered in her ear, and she giggled. He could smell her hair, a sweet smell of—what? At the front door, they did not kiss.

This abruptness of hers during the moments leading to leave-taking (was it that parting produced anxiety, or that her mounting claustrophobia required a quick getaway?) was, as Christopher would witness again and again, part of a style characterized by a variety of impatient behaviors—dramatically rolling her eyes, for instance, whenever it seemed to her that he was being pathetic. They would be a wry couple. But a little sarcasm, even in fun—and the evening had turned out to be fun—a little sarcasm went a long way for Christopher, who, when they next met, at a Village café appropriate for a casual non-date (though it was, in fact, a big date for Christopher, in that it was his turn to risk a few remarks about his own origins), told her, "Everybody laughed at me."

A week had passed since the dinner party.

"Everybody? Who's everybody?" She crossed her arms. She was taking his measure. She wore a pink woollen scarf wrapped loosely about her shoulders, in the style of young Parisian women. At the rear of the café, a mother and her two small children were making a racket. Christopher spoke up. "My family. My family laughed at me," and immediately she broke in, "I understand what you mean. Everybody who matters," and he replied, "Yeah, right?" before continuing, in tones that she would learn to recognize as harbingers of a mild paranoia, "For example, let's say I had something serious on my mind, something to say at the dinner table. I'm trying to think of an example. I can't think of one. It doesn't matter. I could have been talking about anything. They'd burst out laughing! It got so that I was afraid to speak! If I tried telling a joke or a funny story—and I didn't often try that, I assure you—they'd sit in their chairs and chew their food. But I could read the obituaries—well, maybe not the obituaries—and my father and mother and sisters would laugh!"

This made her laugh—*he'd* made her laugh. She could just see the awful scene around the family table. Christopher peeking over the top of the obituary page. She hoped her laughter would be taken conspiratorially, as evidence of her recognition of his mistreatment. And his shame.

At the back of the café, the mother struggled with her children. Crying had begun. Jennifer turned to look. When she finally turned back to Christopher, he said, "You see? You laughed. It's so exasperating."

That was when she rolled her eyes. Was she playing with him? He gazed down at his spoon and knife, at his empty cup set crookedly on its saucer, at the miniature milk pitcher and the sugar bowl. What was the use in telling her how bleak he felt when people found him funny? What if he were to reach across the table and touch her face? Right now. Would she understand, through his touch, that making people laugh felt to him like being hit? What made people want to hit him in this way?

He said, "It's not your fault."

"What's not my fault?"

"Nothing. Everything. I don't know."

How red his hair was beneath the warm coffeehouse lights. He looked to her like a skinny, freckled, Scottish orphan. "You can tell *me* a joke," she said.

"You'll hate it."

"I won't hate it."

"It's not going to be funny."

"Please?" she said.

The joke involved a horse, a carrot, and a man wearing a cap. A third of the way through the setup, he broke character and said, "The guy in the cap is Norwegian. I forgot to mention that." He started over and, a moment later, paused again before saying—to himself? to her?—"Is it a carrot? It's got to be a carrot, it's a horse." Looking across their small table, he could see her eyes narrowing. He sighed and—he was getting panicky now—said, "The reason the horse won't give the Norwegian a ride is that he's depressed. The *horse* is depressed, not the man.” At that point he lost the thread. What in the world was he doing? He had no tolerance for shaggy-dog comedy. He said, “How’s your coffee?”

“Good. It’s good.”

He paid the check, and they walked out and stood on the sidewalk, which was busy with people coming and going in parkas and hats. It struck her, as she watched him standing on the dark street with his hands shoved deep into his coat pockets, that he was a decent person, a serious man, and she wanted to sleep with him, but it was too soon for that, and, besides, she did not see how she could invite him to her apartment, where Susan would undoubtedly be planted on the living-room couch—the foldout couch that Jennifer slept on—watching television in a sweatshirt. Jennifer did not yet know that Christopher was similarly thwarted, that, at his place uptown on Broadway, a different Susan, home from her job, was busy smoking cigarettes, watering her overgrown plants, and talking on the telephone in a haughty, supercilious voice.

She said, “Which way are you walking?”

He said, “Which way are *you* walking?”

“You’re tall,” she commented as they made their way west. She said this because she was forced to hurry to keep up with him on the sidewalk. Christopher did not understand, however, that her compliment was also a plea. He did not slow his pace.

They wound up on a bench overlooking the Hudson, making out. Her mouth tasted faintly metallic to him, and he wondered whether this might indicate a problem with their chemistry. Would she be wrong for him? A wind blew in from the river, and they edged closer to each other, taking the cold as permission to mash together on the slatted bench. He worked his hand inside her coat. He didn’t bother with buttons. Instead, he found passage where the coat flapped open between two closures, and felt, as his fingers burrowed under wool, the bottom of a breast. Should he push his way inside her shirt? He could hear people walking and jogging past. She kissed him harder, and, with his other hand, the hand not buried in her coat, he touched her cheek.

“Freezing hands! Ow!” She jumped up from the bench and, straightening and arranging herself, said—stating a more or less impossible proposition, he thought, considering that the city’s lights, as well as those dotting New Jersey’s urban hills across the Hudson, burned ceaselessly through the night—“Look how late it’s getting!”

Two days later, she phoned to tell him that a friend of hers was leaving town for a weekend trip, and she’d be looking in on her cats. How about dinner at the friend’s apartment? Would that be nice? What should she make? Did he have any food allergies that she needed to know about? “Shellfish? Chocolate? Nuts?”

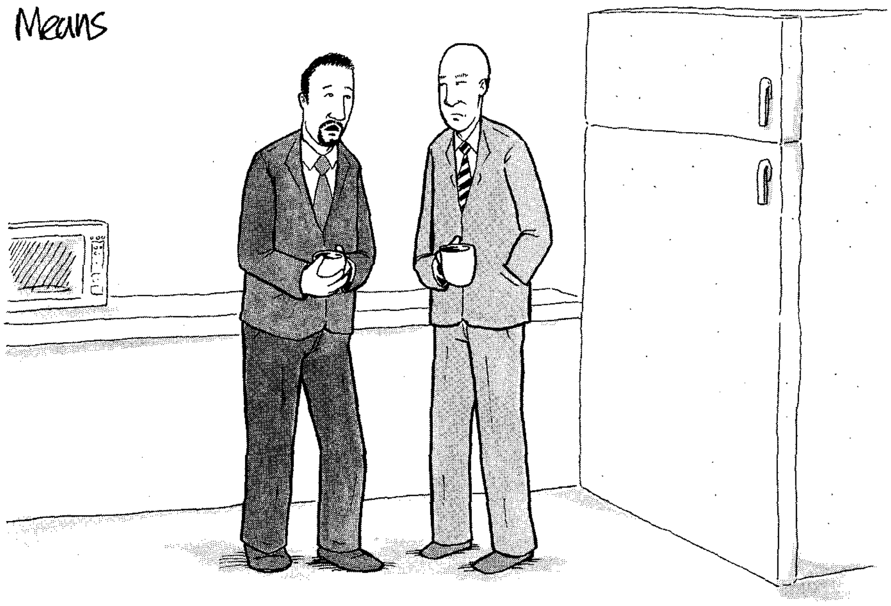
“I’m fine with nuts,” he said, and she told him that she’d started a new painting since meeting him, using bolder colors than she’d ever dared use in the past, and he said that he’d love to see it when it was done, and she nervously said, “I’m afraid that might be a while,” and then they talked about their last couple of days. She’d done her proofreading jobs in the mornings, then painted or gone to painting class in the afternoons, whereas he had hardly strayed from his small room in his Susan’s apartment, the room where he often sat late into the night, drinking—a fact he didn’t let on to Jennifer. Anyway, she told him to write down her friend’s address, and they rang off, and that Friday night he arrived for dinner at a studio apartment with nothing much in it but a pair of Maine coon cats and a queen-size bed stacked with pillows.

“Hello hello,” he said when she opened the door.

“Careful, careful,” she said, meaning: Don’t let the cats out. He could see them behind her feet, angling for escape, barging about on tremendous paws matted with fur. “This is Siegfried. This is Brunhilda.” With one foot, she forced aside a cat. She said, “Come in, hurry,” then added, “Amy”—her friend whose apartment they were about to treat like a motel room—“is from Maine.”

Quickly she closed the door.

The cats seemed a third or so larger than any house cat he’d ever seen. “You look great,” he said to Jennifer, and wondered why he’d failed to bring flowers. She did look beautiful. He hadn’t expected the tartan miniskirt. She’d untied her hair and let it fall, and whatever had earlier seemed hard in her appearance was tempered now. He did a turn around the tiny room. Everything—bed comforter, pillow shams and cases, headboard, the petite dresser near the front door, the phone—was white. There was even a white plastic television. The apartment was on a high floor, and an east-facing picture window overlooked the Empire State Building, lit purple and white at its tip. What holiday did purple designate? Easter? But Easter was weeks away. He sat on the edge of the mattress, then bent over with his head



“I liquidated my assets and put everything into scratch-off lotto.”

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between his knees and stared down a big-headed animal that had wedged itself under the box spring. "Here, kitty."

"They like to play," she said.

"Which is Brunhilda?"

"That one," pointing, "the female."

Then she said, "I guess we'll have to eat on the bed." It was true. There was nowhere else to sit.

He said, "Or on the floor," though the available floor space was not much more than a parquet walkway surrounding the bed (there was barely room to open the closet) and a kitchen area recessed along one wall. "Or in the bathroom?" he added.

She'd chosen halibut in honor of their meeting. Already they were building traditions. While he kept the cats busy with a chewed-up string dragged back and forth across the floor, she cooked the fish in one of Amy's white enamel pans, on top of Amy's white mini-stove. They squeezed onto the floor between bed and window, and balanced their plates on their knees. Paper towels were their napkins. He took a bite and said, "This is terrific."

"Is it? Do you mean that? I'm glad. Salad?"

"In a minute. Thank you."

A cat crashed into his arm and he put down his fork and shoved it away.

"Don't let them bother you."

"It's not a problem. I like cats." In fact, he was allergic. He peered around the room and saw, through watery eyes, a white cosmos. He said, "I feel like I should be drinking milk."

"I think there's some in the refrigerator," she said, and he protested, "No, please, I wasn't serious," leading her to wonder if he'd been making a reference to the cats—was that it?—while he thought back over their past conversations. Had she shown a pattern of literal-mindedness? He saw her puzzlement, and felt as he always did when he allowed himself even the weakest attempt at humor. And what was with these animals that kept coming and coming, nosing around their laps and swatting at their food, so that he or Jennifer seemed always to be hoisting one and tossing it aside?

"No. Siegfried. No," Christopher scolded. His sinuses were flooding. Jennifer threw Brunhilda onto the bed and told him that she was aware that by training to paint in a manner she thought of as realistic—she was aware that, by trying to render from life, she was covertly attacking her mother and what she called her mother's alcoholic world view, a world view quite accurately illustrated, she felt, in the sixties-style abstract paintings her mother never finished, or in the ones she finished but ruined by angrily painting past the point of completion. "She destroys her own work," Jennifer said, and went on to add that she, Jennifer, had recently come to feel that she could, in her own, more representational paintings, not only repudiate her mother but escape her; her attempt to mirror in paint some piece of reality represented her determination to live a dignified life. That was what she believed. Or hoped. She said, "When I study the thing I'm painting, I feel free from not painting."

Instead of asking her, What do you mean? he said, "What do you paint?"

"I'm one of those people standing behind an easel in Central Park."

"Really?"

"It seems quaint, but it's not. It's serious."

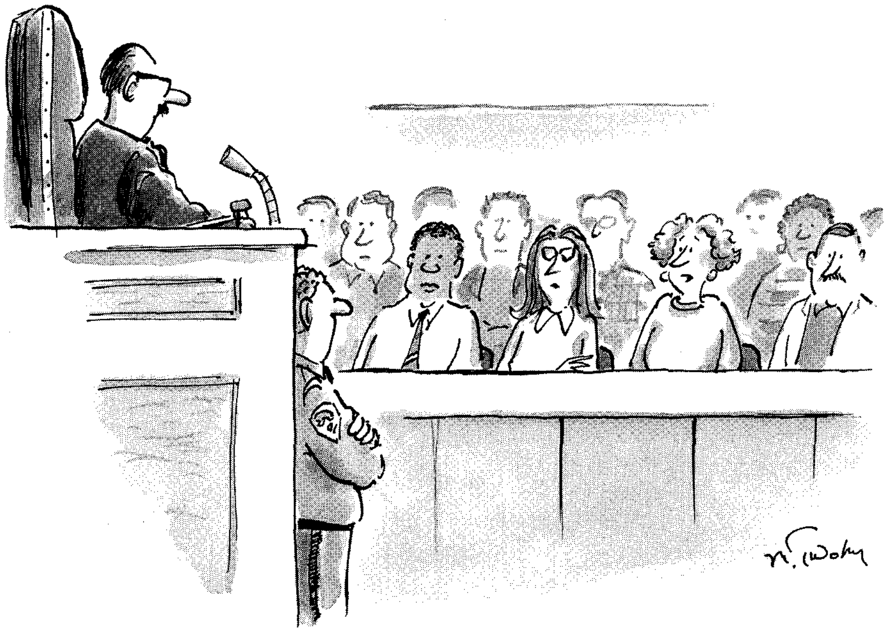
"No. I didn't mean . . . It's not that I . . . I," he said, and this time—she was embarrassed for having embarrassed him—she laughed. How could she not? Weren't couples supposed to laugh together? Sniffling, he said, "What do I know? I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize," she said, and whispered, consolingly, "It's all right. It's all right." Then she confided, "I wear a beret."

"No, you don't."

"Yes, I do."

When they kissed, the metallic taste that he remembered from the bench by the Hudson, and which he'd found himself worrying over up in his room, was gone. Maybe it had been neutralized by the fish. They set their plates on the floor beneath the window. He'd expected her to be nervous with him—at what point might she leap up and end the evening with some excuse or other?—and this made him vigilant and therefore clumsy as he unbuttoned her blouse and felt behind her back for the metal hooks fastening her bra. She helped him with the hooks and her shirt's bottom buttons, and she raised her arms, allowing him to unwrap her. He grabbed her hand and



"Your Honor, it would be a hardship for me to sit on a long, non-celebrity trial."

• •

one of her ankles, twisting her toward him. She clutched his shirt, yanked its tail from his pants, fiercely untucking him. Behind her was the big window, with its skyline view. What would it be like to come home to that?

They got up on the bed, on the pillows, and could hear Siegfried and Brunhilda snapping at the food they'd left on their plates. It was obscene, he thought, this noisy feline licking, and yet he feared that getting up and clearing the plates to the sink might be interpreted as an act of antiseptic fastidiousness, explicitly anti-sexual. He pinned her shoulders to the mattress and leaned down to bite her nipple. Though he did not yet know her body, what pressures to apply, where to linger and for how long, he managed, in spite of his worry that she would find him awkward, to hold her in a way that felt—this was something he sensed—soothing to them both. That said, it was true that she, too, passed through moments of dread. It had always been this way with her. Her heart raced, her skin got a prickly feeling, and she was forced to concentrate on breathing deeply.

Right before he pulled out and came, he looked down and caught her gazing out the window at the Empire State. He brushed her hair off her forehead, lowered his mouth to her ear, and whispered, "Are you with me, Jennifer? Are you there? Are you there, Jennifer?" This got her attention. His quiet murmuring so turned them on that it immediately became repertoire, their version of "Fuck me. Fuck me."

Afterward, she told Christopher some, but not all, of the truth of her childhood. She was afraid, though without having a clear idea why, that if she confessed too much, if she reported in full her memories of her father coming drunk into her room at night, she'd lose him. He'd sat in his underwear in a chair beside her bed, her father had, or, she said to Christopher, sometimes right on the bed, and he'd told her again and again how he loved her, and how he wished the two of them could pack their things, right this minute, and drive away together to some remote place where she'd never hear vicious fighting from the other side of the door. It would be simple. But she had to choose. Would she come with him? her father had asked her, before leaning in close and putting his arms around her neck and weeping morosely. She would always remember the smell of his breath when he'd been drinking.

Christopher listened politely, then, sighing—his turn, once again, to show her that he could face up to his own history—confided in a whisper that he had never been anything but a goddam disappointment to his family, and that, no matter how hard he'd tried, he'd never escaped or really even understood his role as a clown, as a fool, but that he'd finally made up his mind that it didn't matter, that their opinion of him wasn't going to bother him forever. She asked him, then, whether they drank, his parents, and he, startled by this interruption, said, "Oh. You know," to which she replied, "No, I don't know. You have to tell me." And so he said, somewhat defensively, "Yes. They did. They did," then, waving his hands in the dark, went on to announce—it was as if he were making a promise—that he could handle himself in this world. And though he was not, he further acknowledged, currently employed, neither was he concerned. He had savings, in a manner of speaking, from his last and only secure position, as an associate at a law firm where he'd realized early on that he would not have the will or the desire to make partner. What point would there have been in carrying on? he asked her without really asking. He said, closing, "I'm not worried. I can find legal temp work when I need to. Hey, life's just one big process of elimination, right?" He shoved Siegfried aside, jumped up from the bed, and stood staring out at the bright city. Why was he so jittery all of a sudden? "How about a little air?" he suggested, raising the window an inch, letting in the sounds of sirens and car horns blaring far below.

Over the next months, as winter turned to spring, and spring to summer, in apartments in Manhattan and a brownstone in Brooklyn, Jennifer and Christopher developed a pattern of habitation described in rough form by the weekend at Amy's. After hauling overnight bags and specialty-shop groceries into the new house-sit, they would cook without cleaning, nose through cabinets and drawers, and fall in and out of bed, where, after screwing, they might also eat. It never took long for things to go to hell—crumbs in the sheets, ashtrays and unwashed glasses and a wine bottle or two (she liked a glass before sleep) sitting on the floor, spills drying on kitchen countertops, leftovers hardening in pans. "What a disaster," Christopher would invariably say when the time came to tidy up, and she'd answer, rolling her eyes, "Yes, but it's our disaster."

Before they made their escape, she'd scribble a note and leave gift-wrapped soap or a bottle of good olive oil (along with her leftover wine, if there was any) in a place where it would be found the minute the rightful inhabitants came through the door.

Some places worked out better than others. Karen and Peter's Little Italy walkup facing the street was cluttered and dreary, and a tenant in a neighboring apartment had the music turned up loud, but Jennifer, intent on a good time, hauled Karen's wardrobe from the closet in search of skirts and dresses to model for Christopher. Karen had fabulous clothes, in Jennifer's size. It wasn't long before Jennifer began pulling out the shoeboxes as well, along with Karen's cashmere sweaters and blazers, and parading from the bedroom in head-to-toe outfits, while Christopher commented from his chair on the looks that worked and those that didn't. That was a fun night. Less enjoyable was the brownstone, where Christopher caused basement flooding when he used paper towels instead of toilet paper in an upstairs bathroom, clogging a section of pipe, three stories below, that had been rusting away for years. The owners of the house, Sam and Beth, were away in California with their twins, Sarah and Miles, at Sam's grandmother's memorial service. The better part of Christopher and Jennifer's weekend was given over to negotiations with plumbers, negotiations undertaken without consulting Sam and Beth. Finally, a man came in and sawed away and replaced the corroded pipe, and they spent Sunday afternoon laundering the towels they'd used to clean the floor and the assortment of Miles's and Sarah's toys that had been sitting in a pile beneath the leak. "That's what happens when you buy instead of rent," Christopher announced that night as he locked the front door behind them. He said, "Shall we?," and they hurriedly kissed before darting off to different subways and the lives they lived separately during the week.

Then, in May, they shut themselves up inside a modern high-rise on Madison Avenue. For three days, they shared what should have been a paradise of high-ceilinged rooms while the apartment's owner, Danny, a friend of Christopher's who'd inherited a department-store fortune, was away in Germany buying art. He was a collector.

"Jesus," Jennifer said when they walked in. "Will you look at this crap?" She made a clicking sound, dismissive, using tongue against teeth. She'd stopped before a large drawing hanging in the entryway. It was, like all the pieces displayed on Danny's walls, abstract—a charcoal turmoil of overlapping marks, smudges, and erasures executed with such force by the artist that the paper had worn through in places.

"Do you hate it?" Christopher asked. He'd wanted her to be proud of him for scoring Danny's keys. He hadn't thought to worry about his friend's taste. She didn't answer, so he dropped their grocery bags, came up behind her, and wrapped her in a hug. Resting his chin on her shoulder, he looked at the drawing from her point of view. At first it appeared, he thought, inchoate and stagy—as if the artist had been playing with an idea about the drama in disorder. But the longer Christopher stared the more he felt compelled to see otherwise. Was that a reptile skittering across the bottom of the paper? Were those faces? He felt the muscles around his eyes relax as his gaze became less focussed; outlines of faces and figures receded into the drawing's shadows, and the work acquired space and depth, interiority.

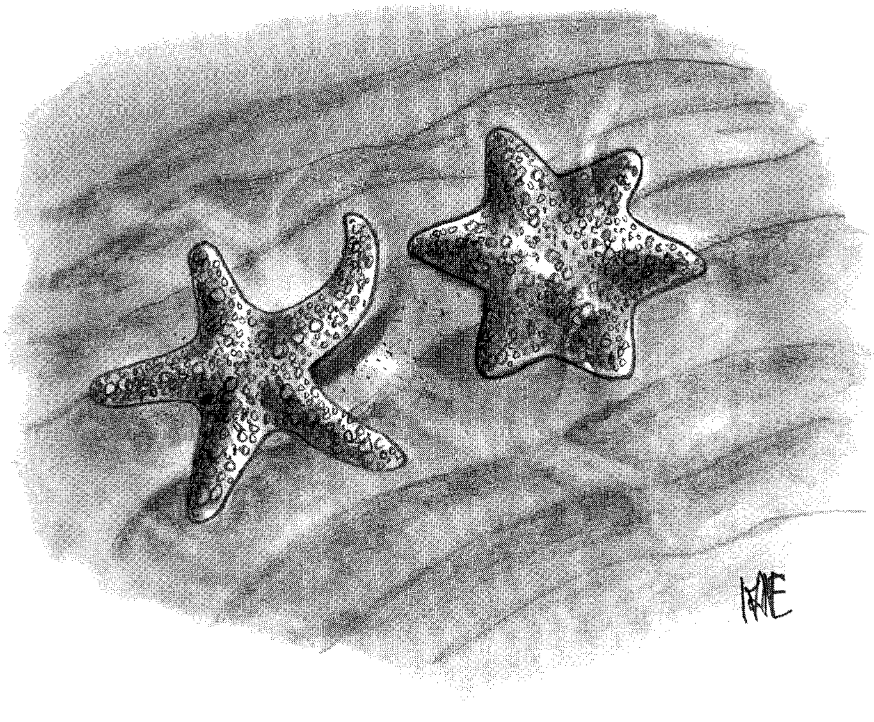
Glancing sideways, he saw that she was biting her lower lip. "How about that? It's a world," he said. She'd been thinking the same thing, though the world she saw was not his world. She saw the white walls and porch-paint gray floor inside her mother's studio, in particular the floor, its smudged arabesques and dirty footprints of paint dripped from brushes held slackly in her mother's hand, year after year, as far back as she could remember.

Why hadn't her mother protected her?

She pried Christopher's arms from her waist, stomped into the living room, and plopped down on one of the leather sofas he'd been looking forward to having sex on while listening to Danny's stereo.

"Go to hell," she said, and he flinched—was she joking? But it didn't sound like a joke.

The situation wasn't much improved in the living room. On one wall was a sculpture that looked like a complicated tricornered hat, with a high crown and a razor-edged brim. And that painting above Jennifer's head couldn't possibly be a—a what's-his-name, could it? Outside, trees were in bloom and the park



"Shalom!"

was alive with insects and birds. But Danny preferred that they not open the apartment's windows. It was important to keep out dust. And, he had asked, could they please not raise the shades during the day, also for reasons having to do with conservation? Perhaps it was the drawn shades that caused Jennifer's bad mood to worsen. Christopher spent Saturday afternoon alone in the semi-darkness, flipping channels on Danny's giant television. Occasionally Jennifer called to him from the bedroom. She didn't feel like getting out of bed, even though she was sharing the room with a Richard Serra print that looked like a leaden, black sun.

"I feel sick," she told him that night when he came in and checked on her. "Do I have a fever?"

He felt her forehead. "If you do, it's not high."

"Ugh," she said.

They had another conversation about art.

"Did you paint this week?"

"I tried one day. It was windy and the stretcher blew off the easel. Twice. Anyhow, it doesn't matter. My painting is all over the place. I don't know what I'm doing."

"That can't be true."

"I don't understand color. I don't understand paint. I want things brighter. Not brighter, more alive. What am I trying to say?"

"Intense? More intense?"

She coughed. "That's part of it. I'm also searching for restraint."

"Intense restraint."

"Very funny," coughing again.

"I didn't mean to be funny."

"Believe me, I know."

He felt her forehead once more, and this time decided that she was hot. She had a temperature. He said, "I'd better get you some aspirin and a glass of water."

When he came back into the room, he sat on the bed and waited while she swallowed the pills.

"Stop staring at me."

"Sorry."

"You're making me nervous," she said. She handed him the glass. "Could you get me a drop of wine? The Merlot on the counter beside the sink?"

"Is that a good idea?"

"It's Saturday night. Who cares if it's a good idea?" She held the glass for him to take. "A drop? Just a drop?"

He took the glass and went out of the room. Who drank with a fever? He made a special effort not to drink on these weekends they shared. He did not want her to see him knocking back a six-pack in the hours past midnight, as he did in secret during the week, on the nights alone—and there were other things he didn't want Jennifer to get wind of. His departure from his job hadn't come about in precisely the way he'd indicated when he'd glossed the matter on their first night together, at Amy's. Had he lied to her? He'd omitted certain specifics. She didn't need to hear about his cavalier approach to sick days or his periodic failure to bill clients, or about the humiliation he'd suffered when, one day, he'd sneaked downstairs to have a beer in the restaurant attached to the building's lobby and a partner standing at the bar had loudly upbraided him over some minor mistake, then called him a drunk. And there was something else Jennifer might not be happy knowing: he'd lately been taking walks in Central Park, hunting for her beneath the trees near Sheep Meadow and the Great Lawn. On his walks he became furtive, nervous; he imagined that if he could catch her at her easel, her brush in her hand, painting a picture of the known world, he might—he might what? Hide behind a tree and, like a trespasser hopped up on adrenaline, watch her? Call her cell phone from his and, while pretending to be nowhere near, chat?

He poured her wine and shoved the cork back into the bottle. He enjoyed a moment of pride over not having any alcohol himself. In the bedroom, he said, "Here."

She took the glass. She sat propped against pillows. She said, "A sip will help me sleep."

"Right."

"It helps before bed, you know?"

"Yes."

"Is something the matter?" she asked, because she'd heard his tone.

"No. I guess not. No." He looked at her body outlined beneath the blankets. How could he tell her what was wrong? What *was* wrong? Was it simply that he didn't care to watch her do what he did? He felt afraid for her—was that it? "It's nothing, I'm fine," he

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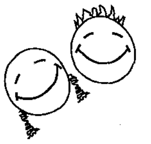

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said, while she drank. But later that night he was unable to sleep. He got up and wandered into the kitchen, where he found Danny's liquor in a cabinet above the stove. He went into the living room and sat up until three drinking Scotch. His mood followed a well-worn path: halfway through his second drink, he knew his life was good—he was a lucky man. Everything, even the glass in his hand—especially the glass in his hand, crystal, heavy-bottomed, warm to his touch—felt right to him. As he drank, his ebullience increased, and he regarded his expensive surroundings as somehow belonging to him, or, more appropriately, as a preview of what he'd surely one day have. But after another few shots his thoughts veered into a familiar loop. Who was he fooling? How would *he* ever have any of this? Why was he unable to take possession of the world's bounties? Why had he and Jennifer not ever gone *dancing*, for Christ's sake? What was their *plan*? They met, climbed into bed, leaped out of bed, said goodbye—was he in love? Was she? Or were they just fucking? They had so much to be thankful for, so much. They had each other.

His face was numb. He gave himself a bit more to drink, put away Danny's bottle, rinsed the glass, and groped his way down the hall to the bedroom, where he stood in his underwear beside the bed. The shades were drawn, the windows blacked out. As Christopher's eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw that each window—there were three—was haloed in a corona of light, the city's nighttime glow seeping in through the narrow chinks between glass and shade. He felt the impulse to wake Jennifer and show her the illuminated windows, as if the phenomenon represented something uniquely worth experiencing, like a solar eclipse. Three black suns hovered over her as she slept. Make that four, counting the Serra.

The following afternoon, he woke beside her. How was she feeling today? A little better, she told him. He, of course, was hungover. But that wasn't a life-or-death problem, was it? She wondered aloud if she'd given him whatever bug had bitten her, and he promised her she hadn't, then asked her—he hadn't planned this; it just came out of his mouth—if she would consider showing him her painting, the one she'd begun in the days after they met. Dry-mouthed, he added, "Don't be scared."

After that, he went ahead and joined her for drinks when they got together. Who took the lead in this new policy? It was she, after all, who didn't make much fuss over a glass of wine. Following his old rule, he waited until dinner was finished before pouring his first, so that he could have a decent amount in a short span of time without causing a sodden evening. When he drank, she drank. Sometimes she smoked. She liked to stand at a window and exhale through the screen. When the nights got warm, she took to opening the screen and leaning out.

Late in June, a heat wave hit. The daytime sky grew white with becalmed air trapped over the city. Faint thunder could sometimes be heard, but storms never materialized, showers never arrived. On the evening of the solstice, Christopher and Jennifer hauled suitcases, groceries, and her painting—shrouded, for protection, in bubble wrap and muslin—up six flights to Bert and Lucie's top-floor apartment. The temperature rose higher and higher as they climbed. When they reached the landing, they stopped to rest. She recovered against a wall, and he leaned his weight on the doorknob, then turned the key in the lock, and they tumbled in. She went straight to the bathroom and ran a cold tub, while he dumped ice cubes from trays to glasses in the kitchen. He stood before the open freezer, letting mist touch his face. He could hear her splashing in the bathroom, and he heard Bert's fish tank bubbling in the living room. What did Bert and Lucie keep in the freezer? Was that a bottle cap poking out from beneath two ice-cream cartons? He pulled out the bottle of gin, unscrewed the top, mopped his face with a dishtowel, refilled the ice trays. It was still light out. Instructions for feeding the piranha had been left on the counter beside the sink. Christopher carried his drink down the hall and peered into the tank. He tapped its glass wall.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are."

The bathroom door opened, closed. "I fixed you a drink! It's in the kitchen!" he called, and heard her walking in that direction. A moment later, he smelled cigarette smoke. He followed down the hall and saw her bent over the windowsill, her head craned out, her back to him. She was naked and damp; the wet ends of her hair stuck to her shoulders. She looked, he thought, with her hair streaming back and her breasts proudly showing, not unlike a ship's figurehead, sea-sprayed. Christopher would remember this vision—Jennifer's raised butt, framed against the building behind Bert and Lucie's, and, above that building, chimneys and water towers crowning roof after roof on the horizon—long after he'd forgotten the things they'd said in these rooms where he and she became partners.

He said, "It's too hot to eat." Dinner lay in a bag on the floor. Propped against a wall was her painting.

"No kidding." Smoke drifted from her mouth.

He leaned against the doorframe and shook his glass, clinking melting ice. "We'll have to make do with this." Was he trying to be funny? Frankly, he wasn't sure.

She shifted her weight from one foot to the other. Her feet were pink from her bath. She said, "That's fine. It's summertime," and, as if on cue, he sneezed.

"Bless you," she said, and he told her, "Something's in bloom somewhere."

She flicked ashes and came in from the window. She squeezed past him on her way to the bedroom. Dying light brightened a corner of floor and the wall beside the painting. Soon it would be dark. She returned wearing one of Lucie's see-through nighties.

He refilled their glasses.

"To home away from home."

"Cheers," she said.

In that heat, without food, they were quickly smashed. He grabbed hold of her lace nightie and, like a man in a conga line, hanging on to keep time with the leader, trotted after her down the hall. In the living room she turned on a light, and they both collapsed onto Bert and Lucie's sofa and watched the piranha tank as if it were a television set, a television broadcasting leafy weeds, luminous rocks, and bubbles, but no fish.

Was he ready to see the painting? Would he be equipped to comment? What might he say? He was going to need a refill.

He said, "Is it worth it?"

"What?" she said. "Is what worth what?"

"Art. Painting. You know."

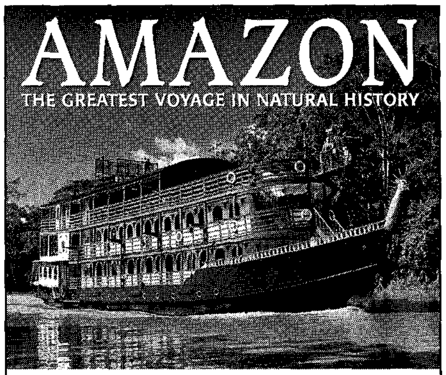
That made her laugh.

"The truth about you is, you're kind of a funny guy. I don't know why you fight it," she told him.

She took his hand in hers, and he turned to look at her. She pulled him close to her on the sofa. He laid his head on her lap. In a minute he would sit up and ask her if she was ready to show him the painting. She would stand up, go barefoot and tipsy to the kitchen, get it, bring it back, and, after warning, "It may not be finished, so be nice," unwrap it.

No. In a minute she would get up, and he would say, "Hey, do you mind," then hand her his glass, and she would go to the kitchen, make him a fresh drink with new ice, and bring it to him along with the painting. He would be careful, in his remarks on her work, to avoid overstating his praises. Yet he would not want her to doubt either his fundamental enthusiasm or her own promise. If the painting was accomplished, or even if not, he would find and appreciate an aspect of it—an element reflecting technical execution and artistic choice, a movement of brushstrokes indicating an intensity of gray light behind bare trees, say, since she'd begun in winter. Or she might have revised with the changing seasons, painting over winter's silvers with the pale greens and eggshell blues that signify spring. There might be a figure in the painting, a man walking quickly through the Park, as he himself had done when out searching for her at her work; and maybe, if the painting showed a man, a man like him, beside a particular tree, rock, or bench, near a path that wound beside the banks of a familiar pond, he might recognize the topography and speak confidently about her handling of perspective, and about the way the light reflected off the water in precisely that way, in that place.

While he mapped out his reaction to her painting, she lit another cigarette. Though he could not see the flame, he saw its image come and go, mirrored in the glass aquarium, and he sensed her hands and arms fluttering in the air above his head. He heard the match being struck. ♦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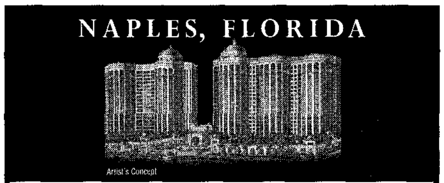
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THE CRITICS

BOOKS

DINING OUT

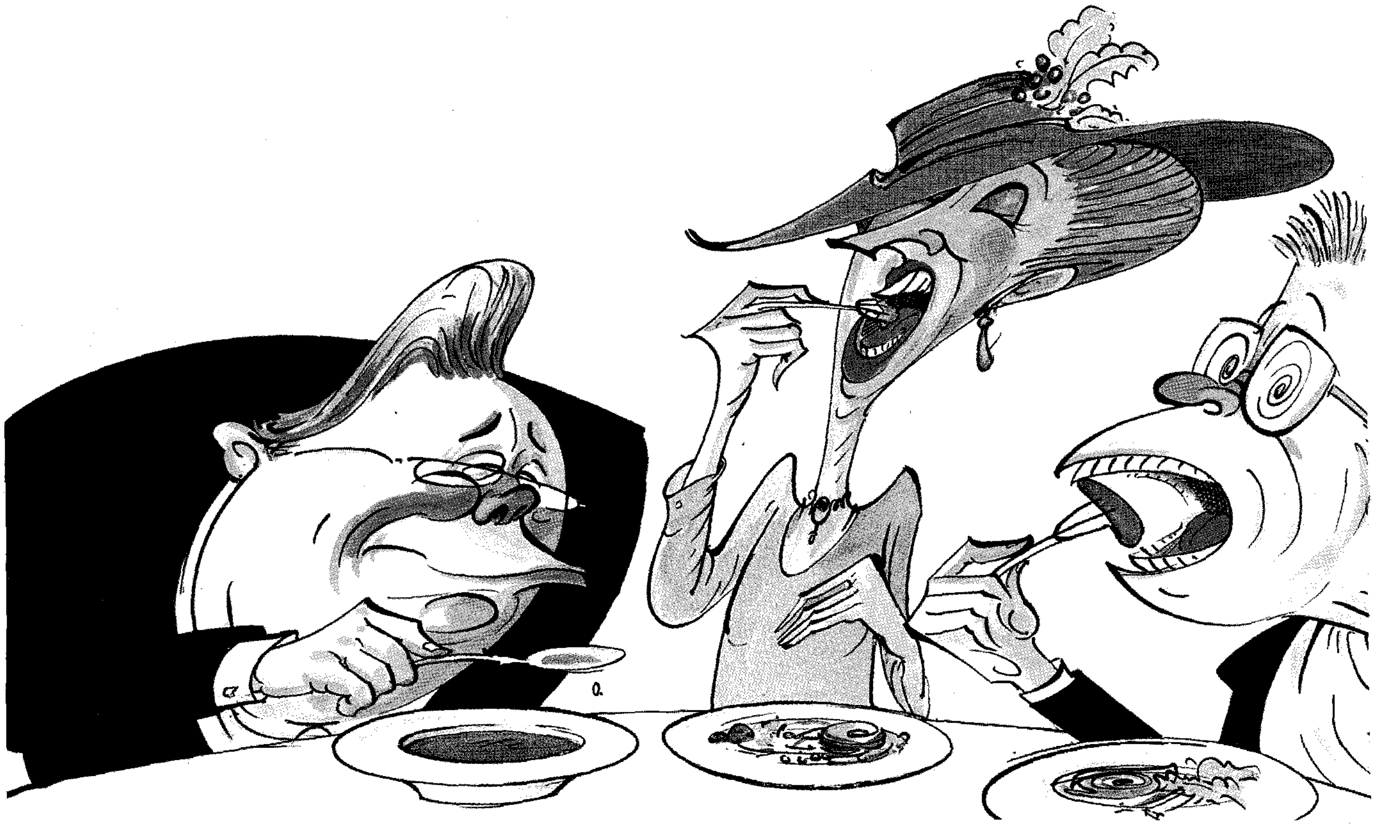
The food critic at table.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

There are two schools of good writing about food: the mock epic and the mystical microcosmic. The mock epic (A. J. Liebling, Calvin Trillin, the French writer Robert Courtine, and any good restaurant critic) is essentially comic and treats the small ambitions of the greedy eater as though they were big and noble, spoofing the idea of the heroic while raising the minor subject to at least temporary greatness. The mystical microcosmic, of which Elizabeth David and M. F. K. Fisher are the masters, is essentially poetic, and turns every remembered recipe into a meditation on hunger and the transience of its fulfillment.

The two styles can't be mixed. If we are reading, say, about Liebling's quest for the secret of how *rascasse* are used in bouillabaisse, we don't want to be stopped to consider the melancholy lives of the remote fishermen who seek them out. And if we are reading David's or Fisher's sad thoughts on the love that got away on the plate that time forgot, we would hate to find, on the next page, the writer handing out peppy stars in modish kitchens. (The same thing is true of sportswriting: we go to it for either W. C. Heinz's tears or Jim Murray's jokes, Gary Smith's epics or Roy Blount, Jr.,'s yarns, which suggests that, with the minor arts, our approach is classical and depends on unity of tone.)

So when we read, in "The Perfectionist: Life and Death in Haute Cuisine" (Gotham; $27.50), Rudolph Chelminski's forthcoming biography of the doomed three-star chef Bernard Loiseau, the story of Loiseau's restless search for a way to transform cauliflower from a discouraging vegetable into a radiant side dish by caramelizing it, we smile at first, and are expected to smile. It is, after all, only caramelized cauliflower. As the search picks up momentum and intensity, however, and we learn how Loiseau began to blanch and strain and purée, we start to succumb to the grandeur of the quest. Why should the search for caramelized cauliflower be any less significant than Ad Reinhardt's search for the pure-black painting, or John Cage's for


GERALD SCARFE

The divide between the mock-epic and the meditative schools of food writing expresses a divide between critics, who experience food as a pure silence? But then when we read that Loiseau committed suicide after the failure of his caramelized cauliflower to impress his critics, we rebel again, in shock. It was, after all, only caramelized cauliflower.

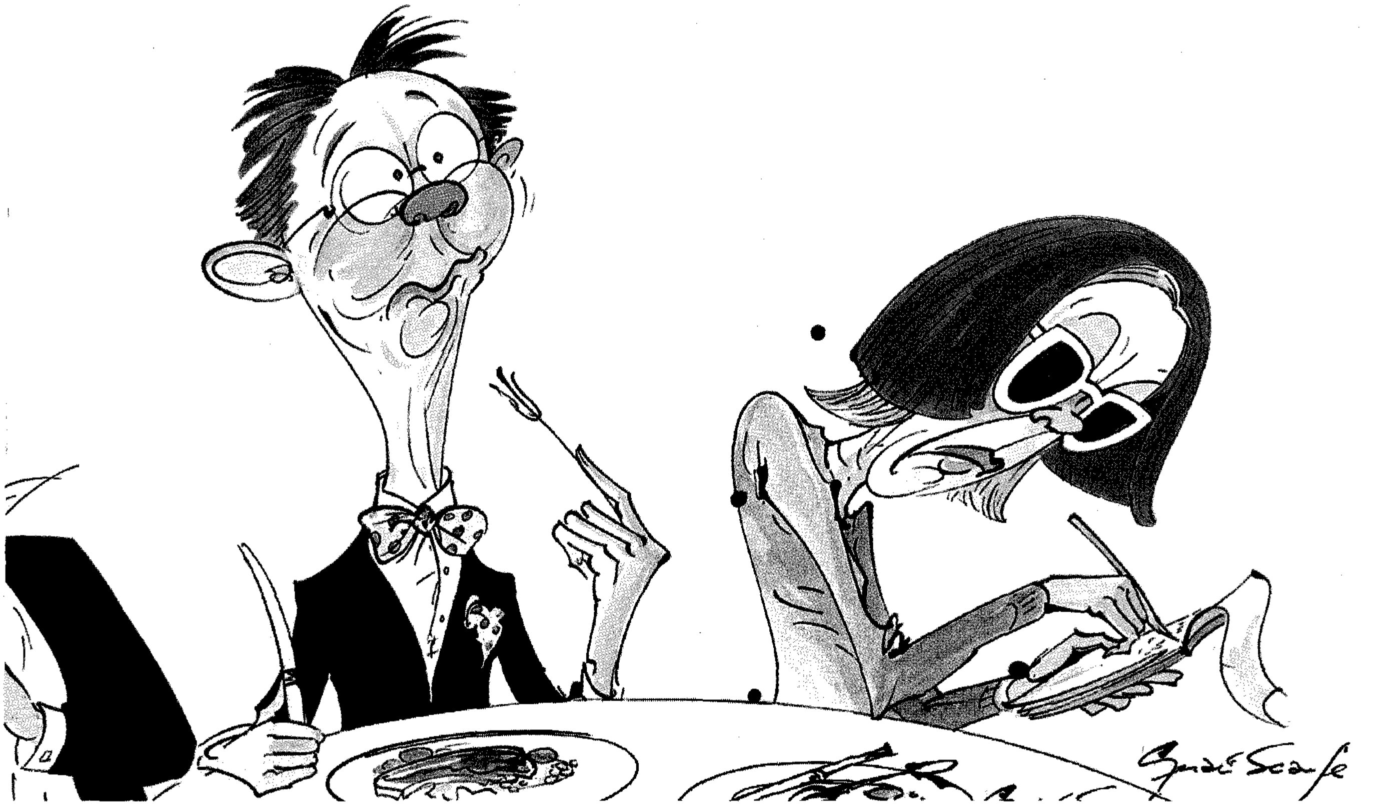
Loiseau seems likely to become a mordant icon of the eternal war between critics and cooks, and Chelminski does a good job with the subject. He has, to be sure, a strange prose style, which seems to have been translated from the French—though in fact he writes in English—as evidenced in the peculiar French journalist's taste for "racy" bits of American slang placed in unidiomatic sequence: "Bernard was a wise guy, or at least appeared to be a wise guy, and that was enough for Jean. Bernard was a talker, too. After the timid caution of the first few weeks of work had worn off, Massillon's champion of gab returned in force, and soon he was entertaining the other *apprentis* with as much chatter and wisecracking as he could possibly get away with." But Chelminski knows the French food world intimately and has a moving story to tell, with universal implications: the downfall of the artist through perfectionism and paranoia.

Loiseau suffered throughout his life from a too-late-identified bipolar disorder, a syndrome that ought to be known by its old French name, *folie circulaire*. It's a syndrome that can strike truck drivers and Zen monks as easily as cooks, so any general principles should be taken with caution. Still, Loiseau, if not typical, is in many ways exemplary of the chef's dilemma.

He was a member of perhaps the last generation of artists who were true to an ideal and a practice that had begun in the nineteenth century. He learned to cook as an intern in the kitchen of the Frères Troisgros, near Lyon, where he mastered the terrifying discipline by chopping onions and filleting fish for twelve hours a day; he even learned to kill frogs by slapping their heads casually against the kitchen table. The Troisgros kitchen opened every door in those days, and in the early seventies Loiseau, with almost no other apprenticeship, made a name for himself, doing simple country cooking at a glorified bistro just outside Paris. He was financed by a shrewd promoter named Claude Verger, who saw that elemental food could be popular and still presented to the critics as something new: a variant of the new cooking, or *nouvelle cuisine*.

That it was simple and not genuinely new does not mean that it was without value; no one had been cooking that way with passion or conviction for a while. Calling plain cooking high cooking was in itself a radical act. Loiseau became a star, and, with money advanced by Verger, he bought La Côte d'Or, a famous old restaurant in the Burgundy town of Saulieu. In the dense, deep-eating days of gratins and casseroles, the place had held three stars in the Michelin Red Guide; by sheer effort, Loiseau built it back up, and the reader cheers with him when he finally gets his three stars, in 1991.

The trouble was that there was no reason to go to Saulieu except to eat, and this made Loiseau particularly, even uniquely, vulnerable to the Guide and its system of stars and inspectors. The Guide no longer had an easy or organic relation to French cooking. The Red Guide grew up with the automobile, and with the idea of the long journey away from Paris that required several stops for lunches and dinners. By the nineteen-eighties, though, the new autoroutes and the high-speed trains (and the planes, racing over) had reduced the need for road stops. The Michelin inspectors, gloomy middle-aged men eating alone,



omedy and believe in their right to have fun; and cooks, who experience it as a form of work and believe in their right to a livelihood.

PRAYER BONES

And the nights were long, weren't they? Cavernous
Things, they drew you to them, outward and away—
To the hungering fields wracked with winter.

The nights were fathomless; the wind, the low hills
Dwindling. The unforgiving light was your own.

You fell to your knees, didn't you? Lost yourself
To the frostbitten ground. Tore at the gracelessness
Inside of you, while helplessly calling her name.

Until, as from nothing, nothing would open.

—*Ian William Douglas*

used to be indistinguishable from the other gloomy middle-aged men eating alone, and their stars were a kind of summary of the opinions of all those tired travelling professionals. Now all that's left of this once self-evident system is the inspectors, dining alone and passing out stars. People do not drive by the restaurant and stop to eat; they drive to the restaurant and stop for a three-star meal. To be a destination is a difficult trade: it is nice to run a place where the food, in the famous phrase, is worth a journey, hard to keep it going when the only reason anyone makes the journey is to eat the food.

Loiseau was terrified of losing his stars, particularly when François Simon, of *Le Figaro*, hinted that La Côte d'Or was on its way down. The chef may have been paranoid in this, but he was hardly alone. All artists in all fields despise all critics all the time. (They may like the individual critic, but they despise his conviction that he has a right to criticize.) Still, there are levels of loathing, as there are circles in Hell. Writers at least recognize that the critic is a writer, and shares a table, if not an agent. Magicians, on the extreme edge, despair of those outside their circle ever knowing the difference between a trick that anyone can buy for six dollars and sleight of hand that only two people have learned in six years. Chefs are close to magicians in their certainty that their critics cannot tell the difference between something that takes time, thought, and talent and something that dazzles only by surprise, perversity, and snob appeal. But, even more than magicians, chefs depend on the good opinion of those whose opinions they cannot think are worth having—and the nature of Loiseau's cooking left him open to the exhaustion of critics.

Chelminski points out that food critics are even more inclined than other kinds to fatigue. Most food critics are sick of eating rich, expensive food and will do almost anything to have something new; a perfectly prepared veal chop (one of Loiseau's elemental specialties) first gets a smile, and then a yawn. But Loiseau, his biographer admits, was at an edge of simplicity so extreme that it hinted at innocence. (Chelminski suggests that Loiseau's training was short on fundamentals; he was notorious among his staff for being unable to make even basic sauces.) Famous for the purity of his approach, Loiseau deglazed his pans with water instead of wine or even stock. It was admirably minimal, but it also tended to be oddly ascetic and depressing; the elemental and the elegant are sisters, but not twins. Loiseau had no hesitation about publishing a recipe for John Dory served with a purée made of boiled celery. (It seems so simple that one is convinced that it must be mysteriously great; I have made it, and it tastes like fish with boiled celery purée.)

Loiseau, it now seems, thrived briefly at a short, fundamentalist moment in the history of cooking, just between the Protestant Reformation of nouvelle cuisine and the rococo Counter-Reformation of today's *cuisine tendance* (trendy cooking, though speculative cooking might be a better name), the kind of ostrich-tongue-with-rutabaga-foam-and-Jurassic-salt-on-a-stick cooking that unites the Spaniard Ferran Adrià, of El Bulli; the Californian Thomas Keller, of the French Laundry; and our own Wylie Dufresne, of WD-50.

Yet Loiseau is hard not to love. He was, like everyone, a casualty of history and his own demons; but he was also, as Chelminski insists, a perfectionist, for whom the disapproval of a single diner was almost impossible to accept, which is what makes his story heartbreaking and instantly understandable. "Why didn't he like it?" he would moan inconsolably when one of a hundred diners sent a dish back unfinished. The chef's life is a long struggle with the reality that tastes differ, and tastes change.

The Loiseau example suggests that the divide between the mock-epic and the meditative schools expresses an even simpler divide between the way critics and cooks experience food. The diner experiences it as a form of comedy and the cook experiences it as a form of work. (The cook's recompense for not having fun—for those hours and hours of life spent chopping onions—is a sense of soul and of significance.) One goes for pleasure and believes in his right to mock and have fun; the other cooks in desperate exhaustion and believes in his right to a livelihood.

Ruth Reichl's "Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise" (Penguin Press; $24.95), a memoir of her time in the hottest of hot critical seats in America, that of restaurant critic of the *Times*, tells the story from the other side of the mirror. Her book would make a terrific romantic comedy, if Lubitsch or Billy Wilder were alive or if Nora Ephron wanted to make it. Reichl, in order to conceal her identity from the restaurant people who were desperate for her good opinion, dined in disguise throughout her five years at the *Times*, not merely wearing wigs and dark glasses but actually creating and inhabiting whole alternative characters: a chorine called Chloe, a sad "Glass Menagerie"-type lady called Molly, and even a version of her mother, homey and sensible. She came, a Method critic, to live these characters: they wrote the reviews. In the movie, of course, the hard-eating, Falstaffian R. W. Apple, Jr., character would hate her in her fussy office identity as a "nouvelle" eater, and fall for her in one of her disguises in the restaurant. (There is even a wisecracking, snooty but winning friend—obviously the Stockard Channing role—who has to be converted to the merits of sushi.)

What makes Reichl's book genuinely touching is that—plangent complication—she sees herself as a cook, and seems to identify secretly with her targets. Compelled by admirable maternal instincts, within a two-career marriage, to take her son from one overpriced, overwrought restaurant meal to another, she convincingly suggests that the restaurant critic's life is an ordeal; the recipes she inserts in the text (leg of lamb, matzo brei) seem to be intended as oases of sense in the midst of all this madness, and as signs of her real identity, as a cook.

At the same time, the book is wonderfully revealing about the double consciousness of the critic. Although pain-giving herself (and admiring of "delightful" pans), she is sensitive about criticism of her own criticism, and spends time collating phone messages for and against, walking the streets with anxiety when her first review comes out as she waits to hear what the bosses think. (Critics never allow these two parts of their brain to communicate, or stop to think that the pain you take is, as the Beatles might say, equal to the pain you make.) The back-and-forth between the soulful stuff that she writes about her family and the sometimes surprisingly catty stuff that she writes about her working life (she is not particularly kind about her editors at the *Times*) is conscious, certainly, but also deeply felt. You think, She really didn't like the gig.

There is a moment when, after she reviews Le Cirque, she walks back to her childhood neighborhood, reconnecting with what actually made food into a significant thing for her. She clearly feels that there is something ignoble, or at least remote from her original infatuation, in sending expense-account diners off to this or that French temple. This is the lesson critics learn the hard way, and we are as relieved as she is when she is at last set free and gets a job as editor of the magazine *Gourmet*. She is tired, we know, of eating in disguise, when what she really wants is to be cooking for her family out in the open.

Reichl, after all her experience, compares the restaurant world of New York to a theatre, with the diners and critics merely players in it. But everything can be described in terms of performance and theatricality; *all* the world's a stage. Surely it is identity politics, rather than just playacting, that is at stake in costly dining out. All those people waiting in line at Le Cirque are not waiting for their selves to be lost or exchanged; they are waiting to be affirmed, even enhanced, and they do it even at the risk of humiliation. Not *Enter and become another!* but *You belong here* is what we want the maître d' to tell us. (And the illusion that we want the chef to give us is not *I work for you* but *I feed you from love.*) This affirmation, it seems, is easier to get than we might think. Steven A. Shaw is identified by his publishers as a former attorney who began a second career as a food and restaurant critic in 1997. He has an upcoming book called "Turning the Tables: Restaurants from the Inside Out" (HarperCollins; $24.95), and it attempts to show you how not to be intimidated or overwhelmed when dining out: he wants you to be an expert at eating in restaurants, even as the author is an expert on eating in restaurants. This seems a queer expertise, a self-evident specialization, but he does give much sound, neighborly advice on getting reservations (just humble yourself to the person who answers the phone, and someday the table, like your prince, will come) and some sane if fairly obvious counsel: "Understanding one's own preferences and needs, as well as those of your dining companions, is foundational to making good restaurant choices."

He is briskly tough, though, and quite courageous in his assaults on the *Times*' reviewing. The whole elaborate, boastful rigmarole of disinterestedness and disguise celebrated in Reichl's book he sees not as honest but as ignorant and provincial, common sense clouded over by fear—as though restaurants were there to scam you. He insists that the food in the kitchen is, of necessity, the food that gets served to everyone, critic or yokel (and the few exceptions are those restaurants where contempt for the paying customers is apparently part of the charm, as at Le Cirque). There is no more need for the elaborate masks of the restaurant critic than there is for Robert Hughes to go to a museum in a Groucho Marx nose-and-glasses. A good critic can't be fooled. The best that the critic can hope for is to be treated as a friend of the house, but all you have to do to become a friend of the house, Shaw says, is to be one. Restaurants are businesses before they are anything else. Dine twice a week at Le Bernardin, the thought is, and you will magically have the table you want at Le Bernardin. This is only partly true; the known critic gets sent out far more plates and extras and desserts than you or I do, and often far more than he knows what to do with. (I once ate with a very fine chef who had the habit of sending out extra plates to friends at his own place. When the chef at the place where we were eating kept sending out extra plates to him, he said, finally, "You know, it never occurred to me before how annoying this is. You're forcing people to eat things they weren't in the mood for and then to make a big show of appreciating them.")

Shaw, it emerges, is a rare thing, a food writer who identifies not with cook or critic but with the restaurant owner, whose struggles and exasperations he admires and sympathizes with. (*Please* call to cancel that reservation, he urges.) He wishes that restaurant critics, instead of skulking around cross-dressing and pretending to be called Marmeluke, would, like critics in other fields, be "champions of excellence who promote the best . . . while exposing the worst." But, of course, all those other critics, though rarely dressed up in wigs and makeup (or dressed at all, for that matter), are notoriously irascible, tendentious, bad-tempered observers who like nothing more than settling old scores, indulging eccentric prejudices, and using someone else's table or text as an occasion to riff on their own obsessions. Critics cannot be made responsible any more than chefs can be made calm; it is the occupational disease. The real use for the food critic's disguises, anyway, one suspects, is not as a form of espionage but as a form of armor: it is not we who are protected from getting a false impression but the critic who is protected from violating the most primal of all taboos—being publicly ungrateful to someone who has shared his food with you. (If it wasn't really you, then you weren't really ungrateful.)

From these practical essentials, it is a pleasure to move to the world of encyclopedic knowledge. The encyclopedia form, of brief and then longer bursts of pure weird data, only just touched by the spry hand of commentary, is irresistible, and alphabetical organization, being both hyper-orderly and completely random, is irresistible, too. In the extraordinary new "Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America" ($250), edited by Andrew F. Smith, the dour history of Pizza Hut abides near the basic conundrum of Plates, which nestles beside the joys of Plums, while a neat, disabused bit on the Politics of food in America gives way to the fun of Pomegranates and Popcorn, before the social historian resumes his seat with a history of Popeyes Chicken & Biscuits. Anyone who can put it down is unburdened by curiosity about anything. Through its countless entries, two stories emerge. First, of the overwhelming abundance of the American larder, and how capitalism has struggled to enlarge and exploit it, and, second, of how the Protestant tradition of making people feel guilty about eating well—expressed in fad diets, health scares, and so on—has been balanced by the Protestant tradition of making people feel guilty for not eating well, expressed in cooking lessons, recipe books, and the growth of a huge industry of food writing meant for home cooks. One has only to compare the great French chef Alain Ducasse's "Culinary Encyclopedia" (Les Éditions d'Alain Ducasse/Stewart, Tabori & Chang; $250) to see what can be made elsewhere of the same idea. Ducasse's encyclopedia consists not of entries on food but of pictures of and recipes for good things to eat. Under "P," we get a picture of simmered suckling-pig chops and feet with porcini-mushroom polenta in a sage sauce, and the recipe. Even for a good cook the dishes are essentially unrealizable, but that does not alter their encyclopedic significance: images of Heaven are painted to encourage you to go there, not to help you build it in your back yard.

At the opposite pole lies Denise Gigante's "Taste: A Literary History" (Yale; $35), which takes food and eating as a metaphor for Western experience. Gigante's is the kind of book that one can mock with ease and imitate at peril: "If we approach Wordsworth's concept of feeding through the mechanics of assimilation, as described in Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, we find that the feeding mind naturally exists in a precarious state of tension with its own abjected matter," and so on. But it makes an arresting point: the model of food as a metaphor for pleasure is balanced uneasily between the mouth and the anus, between taste that urges us on and the excrement ("abjected matter") that food becomes. The larger argument is that the bourgeois age of the restaurant was born of (or accompanied by; it is sometimes hard to be sure which) an aesthetic shift, vast in scope and incarnated by the poets, in which the old attempt to banish excrement from the discourse of appetite by emphasizing the purity of the eater was overtaken by an aesthetic in which the reality of digestion was accepted and made part of the acceptable way in which people thought and talked about life. Appetite need be neither indulged nor suppressed—it could be modified, by that very thing called "taste." Gigante has a nice section on Charles Lamb in which she shows how, in his famous essay on roasted pig, he invented a comic but still largely melancholic, elegiac tone with which to write about eating.

Gigante is surely right that eating, along with seeing, provides the most universal of all metaphors of value: along with the sensations of light and dark, which properly belong to painting, the perception of sweet and bitter is the most natural of all natural metaphors. ("Sweet" was one of Shakespeare's favorite modifiers.) The metaphors of taste are *so* basic that they imbue and infiltrate our entire experience, and we no longer think of them as metaphors.

With no other crafted thing is the line between sensation and meaning quite so quickly crossed, quite so easily extended from something felt to something known, as with food. The tongue has no sooner said "Sweet" than the heart says "Home!" All art, it has been said, aspires to the condition of music. But we want some of our art to aspire to the condition of background music. What makes Mozart, Vivaldi, the Beatles essential to our lives? Is it the hours we spend, scores on knees, listening in the dark? Or the hours and hours and hours we spend with them just on, wrapped around our lives—giving them some emotion to organize that they, miraculously, do? What makes Piero's pillars or van Gogh's stars and cypresses or Botticelli's faces so dear to our existence: the minutes we spend footsore, staring at them on a once-in-a-lifetime trip, or the glimpses on posters and in books and postcards that fill the corners of our eyes and lives? Good cooking is beloved because, when it is good enough, it gives more immediate pleasure and then recedes more rapidly, more gracefully, into the metaphoric middle distance than any other cultural thing, letting us arrange our lives, at least for one night, around it.

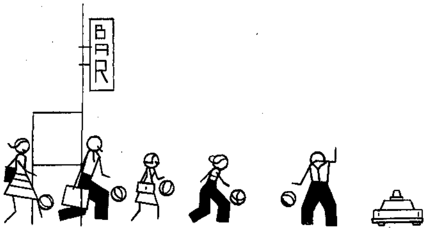
The metaphors of food are so closely tied to our sensations that they must be elevated to ring out. That would explain why good food writing, by cook or critic, has been so expansive in theme. All animals eat. An animal that eats and thinks must think big about what it is eating not to be taken for an animal. This largeness of vision ("I write of hunger," Fisher said flatly, when tasked with writing about food) seems to have become harder to achieve, perhaps because the subject has become so specialized.

There is too much food in most food writing now—too much food and too little that goes further. When Liebling and Fisher wrote, they gestured from plate and glass to something bigger, outside the dining room—to France, or to appetite itself—and the gesture carried instantly, because there was little else in the room to absorb it. These days, the old twin circles (the family around the table, the cosmos beyond) have been supplemented by so many other circles of attitude that the writer points from the plate to—another writer. Like so many other subjects, food writing is constricted within these ever-tighter circles of opinion, when what we want from it is ever-broadening metaphors of common life. Metaphor is social and shares the table with the objects it intertwines and the attitudes it reconciles. Opinion, like the Michelin inspector, dines alone. ◆

BRIEFLY NOTED

Pinkerton's Sister, *by Peter Rushforth. (MacAdam/Cage; $26).* Rushforth's second novel, which took him twenty-five years to write, is set in Edwardian New York and takes place on a single day, largely in the avid mind of its heroine, Alice Pinkerton, a bibliophilic spinster with a stammer and a penchant for dressing in white. Something of a cross between Harriet the Spy and Jane Eyre, she passes her days devising ways to expose "the humorless of Longfellow Park," as epitomized by her nemesis, the dowager Mrs. Albert Comstock. She is regarded, unsurprisingly, as the neighborhood eccentric and undergoes various period cures, like hypnotism. Rushforth weaves Alice's often fantastical musings together with bits of the classics, popular novels, doggerel, and even advertisements for dentures and corsets. Although the author's reliance on allusion occasionally shades into the merely curatorial, his novel constitutes an epic inquiry into literature's role as an engine of interior life.

The Swimmer, *by Zsuzsa Bánk, translated from the German by Margot Bettauer Dembo (Harcourt; $23).* In a sequence of dreamlike episodes, Bánk reveals the complicated inner lives of a young sister and brother in nineteen-fifties Hungary, who, after their mother abandons them to flee to the West, are led on a strange trek around the country by their devastated father. He becomes obsessed with swimming and takes them into the water no matter what the weather. As they travel, the girl builds up imaginary friendships with passing strangers, and her brother talks to stones and the sky. Bánk's interest in how the imagination can fill absence and longing with charms and portents is grounded in exceptional powers of description.



Wedding of the Waters, *by Peter L. Bernstein (Norton; $24.95).* In the early eighteen-hundreds, the wild idea began to circulate of a man-made waterway that would connect Lake Erie to the Hudson River. At the time, canals were an exciting technology. George Washington was fascinated by them, and spent his last years attempting to tame the Potomac. But geography favored New York, where the Mohawk River Valley offered a natural cut in the mountains. Bernstein's lively account covers the political debates that surrounded the canal's financing and choice of route, and also the tenacity of the local workers who completed the project. The inauguration, in 1825, of the Erie Canal sparked a cultural revolution as interior cities became port towns. The number of patents increased, suggesting an intellectual awakening, but there were also fears that mobility could lead to moral decline, and one paper denounced the canal as "the Big Ditch of Iniquity."

Omaha Blues: A Memory Loop, *by Joseph Lelyveld (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $22).* It is not the habit of newspapermen, even those as accomplished as Lelyveld, a former executive editor of the *Times*, to write memoirs of the heart. The usual mode is wry, crackling nostalgia (Mencken and Dreiser) or institutional accounting (Arthur Gelb, Max Frankel). At the *Times*, Lelyveld was known as a brilliant yet shy master of the newsroom, but here he is after something nakedly personal—the secrets of his warring and troubled parents and his own injured youth. At the heart of the story is a misaligned Midwestern marriage—a literary mother and a political father, who was one of the most prominent Reform rabbis in the country. Lelyveld goes about his project of retrieval bravely, with the industry, the scrupulousness, and the ruthlessness of a lifetime's reportorial discipline. The result is a book that does not care to charm, and does not; rather, it arrives at redemption and forgiveness through the meticulous act of finding out, and recording, the truth.

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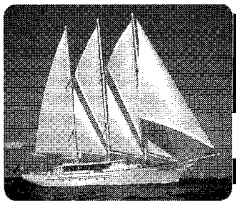

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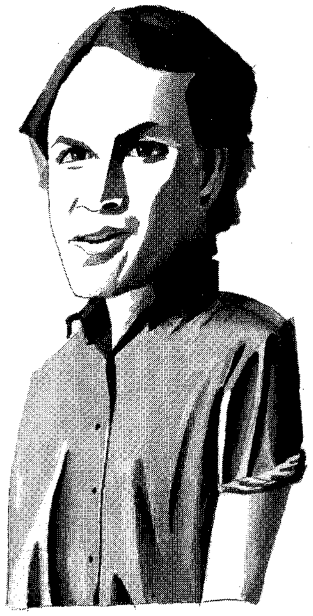
A new thriller from an unheralded master of suspense.

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

In the long, groping, and haphazard drama of evolution, human consciousness is a recent and precarious acquisition. Our anxiety at its precariousness has much to do with our increasing life expectancy: living longer physically, what can we expect to experience mentally? Neurological impairment is something we're all too likely to know firsthand, and Peter Abrahams's suspense novel "Oblivion" (William Morrow; $24.95) makes of this condition something rich and strange: an investigation into "lost time, like some dark forest in a fairy tale." The protagonist is a forty-two-year-old Los Angeles private detective named Nick Petrov, who, at first unknowingly, suffers from a form of brain cancer ("glioblastoma multiform") whose symptoms he attempts to rationalize or conflate with the progress of his current investigation. Unlike the morbidly compelling case studies of Oliver Sacks's "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat" (1970), which are narrated from outside the afflicted individuals, "Oblivion" immerses us in Petrov's assailed consciousness as he navigates his way through a Dali landscape of baffling clues, memory lapses, and visual hallucinations in an attempted reconstruction of personality that is simultaneously a search for a missing fifteen-year-old girl: "Find the girl and live."

It is a turn of the screw that Petrov, the Russian-born son of a former K.G.B. agent turned C.I.A. contractor, is a celebrated private investigator known for his success in finding missing people, and a further turn of the screw that, in his search for the girl, the clues Petrov begins to discover in his own possession overlap ominously with a seemingly solved case of his from twelve years earlier: "What happens if when all your energy is focused on a shaky future, the past suddenly gets shaky, too?" The vividly delineated physical terror of Petrov's predicament is compounded by the psychological terror of his loss of self in a recurring phrase wielded by Abrahams to chilling effect: "His mind was changing him."



Peter Abrahams

MARK ULRIKSEN

"Oblivion" is composed in spare yet often poetic prose. More sympathetic in its portraitures than its satiric predecessors "Their Wildest Dreams" (2003) and "The Tutor" (2002), it's an artful variant of the familiar nightmare—familiar, indeed, as a fairy tale—of the amnesiac waking to a jigsaw-puzzle world to be reassembled by heroic effort. In its L.A.-noir atmosphere, as in its knottily woven plot, it may remind readers of Christopher Nolan's ingeniously contrived mystery film "Memento" (2000), whose initial violent scene is in fact its climax, from which, in reverse chronology, enigmatic vignettes follow as a man afflicted with anterograde amnesia tries to discover who has killed his wife. "Oblivion" similarly begins with a scene out of chronological order, in which Petrov commits perjury while testifying in a trial, though we don't understand this crucial fact until a hundred pages later, when, seeing himself on videotape, in the way of a man observing a stranger, Petrov understands it. The investigator may even be guilty of having murdered a former, blackmailing mistress, and of having disguised the killing as the last in a series committed by a madman ironically named Reasoner, whom Petrov was pursuing at the time: "Suppose there was a serial killer on the loose and you wanted to kill somebody. All you'd have to do is find out the details of the serial killings and do yours the very same way. Who would ever suspect?" Only another investigator, as it turns out.

Petrov is a riskily impaired hero for a work of genre fiction, a private "eye" whose vision is occluded. Before a cerebral hemorrhage wipes away much of his memory, he seems to have been a kind of machine of ratiocination. Following the example of his spymaster father, he takes all notes in code. He's a taxonomist of human emotion who has sketched and labelled ninety-three facial expressions: anxiety is sixty-one, contempt forty-one, dread sixty-eight, confusion twenty-seven, disgust fifty-three, and fear one. Petrov has been celebrated in a made-for-TV dramatization of his most famous case, "The Reasoner Case," with Armand Assante (playing Petrov), Kim Delaney ("a year or two before she hit it big") as a female investigator who was Petrov's lover, and an apparently miscast Dennis Franz as the sadist killer. In an act of desperate self-scrutiny, Petrov studies this film as if it were not a TV exploitation of the case but a documentary to be decoded.

Although Abrahams's novels are genre-affiliated, they differ considerably from one another in tone, texture, ambition, and accomplishment. Often the prose is coolly deployed as a camera, gliding over the surfaces of things, pausing to expose vanity, foolishness, pathos. (In the dark suburban comedy of manners "The Tutor," an affluent family invites a virtual demon into the household in a frantic effort to raise the son's S.A.T. scores, with disastrous results for nearly everybody.) Unlike most suspense fiction, which operates on the practical principle that swift, cinematic scenes will keep readers turning pages without lingering to wonder about verisimilitude, originality, or, indeed, literary worth, Abrahams's novels are gratifyingly attentive to psychological detail, richly atmospheric, layered in ambiguity.

Abrahams's ambitious début novel, "The Fury of Rachel Monette" (1980), is a curious amalgam of the literary novel and the thriller, its intricate plot linking the present-day kidnapping of an American child and the murder of his college-professor father to Nazis during the Second World War, covert Israeli politics, and contemporary anti-Semitism. Both "The Tutor" and "A Perfect Crime" (1998) contain high-I.Q. psychopaths who imagine themselves to be writers creating narratives of destruction, and who become infuriated when the world fails to conform to their fantasies. "Characters again acting on their own," the tutor Julian thinks, "leading to plot complications without end." "A Perfect Crime" alludes elliptically to Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," the villainous cuckold Roger Chillingworth replicated by a yet more villainous cuckold named Roger Cullingwood, who plots to murder his adulterous wife. In "Lights Out" (1994), a young convict named Eddie falls, oddly, under the spell of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"; released from prison, and involved again in a life of violent crime, Eddie yet seeks out the meaning of Coleridge's poem as if it were a riddle relating to his life. When a bookish young man tells him, "The albatross is just a device, the MacGuffin," the literal-minded Eddie doesn't get it.

Yet Peter Abrahams's strongest novels seem to suggest, despite their allegiance to genre, a fascination with something beyond mere form. "I don't like loose ends," the damaged hero of "Oblivion" says. The novel climaxes with a ritual confrontation, in this case in an underground passageway, between the hero and his nemesis, who has been stalking him in plain sight throughout. To some readers, the ending will seem overly tidy; to others, admirers of mystery and suspense novels, it has the feel of the inevitable. As in the Shakespearean sonnet, the fixed-rhyme couplet marks the ending.

Fixed forms, however, can yield infinite, ingenious variations. If all art is about degrees of woundedness, genre fiction is most clearly the art of the compensatory. In his epigraph to "Oblivion," Abrahams quotes this striking passage from "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat": "It must be said from the outset that a disease is never a mere loss or excess—that there is always a reaction, on the part of the affected organism or individual, to restore, to replace, to compensate for and to preserve its identity." ♦

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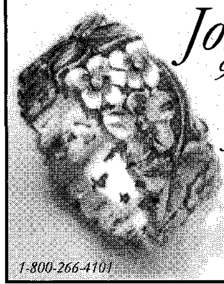
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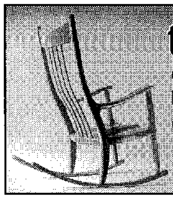
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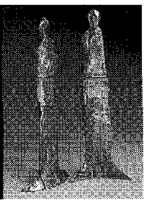
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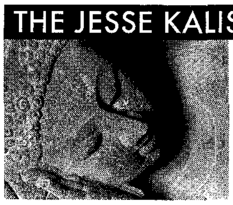

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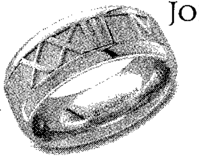

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DANCING

CLASS ACT

Matthew Bourne does Harold Pinter.

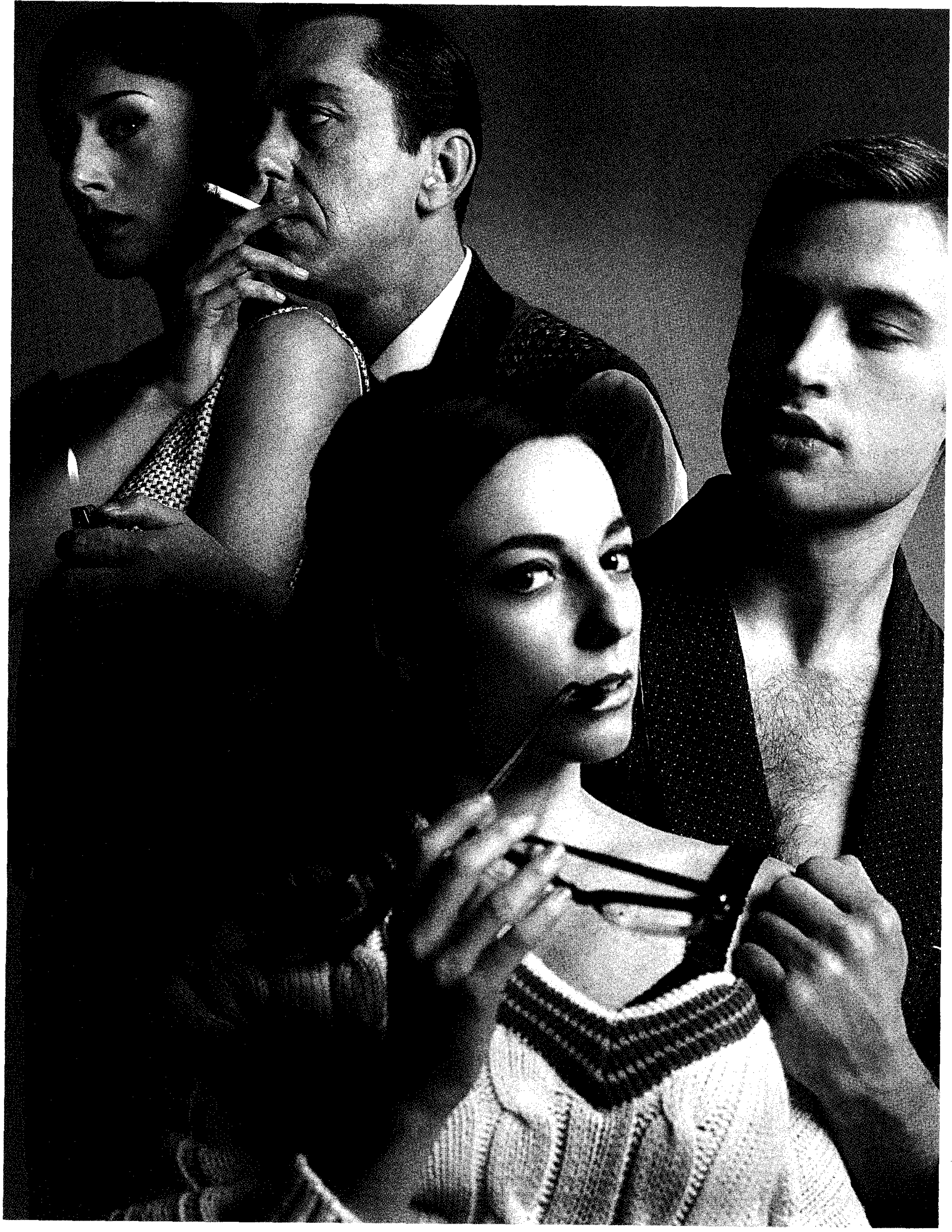
BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Matthew Bourne, who is probably the most acclaimed choreographer in England today, founded his first troupe, campily called Adventures in Motion Pictures, in 1987—a ragtag seven-member group that tooled around England in a minivan putting on outrageous shows. Bourne eventually became famous for his "deconstructions" of the classics, those irreverent updatings which the Europeans like so much. His deconstructions, or the ones I saw, were worth liking. He made a "Cinderella" set during the Blitz, a "Carmen" that took place in a garage, a "La Sylphide" about Glasgow's drug scene. (That show opens in a public toilet.) Most popular was his "Swan Lake," with its dangerous-looking, all-male pack of swans. This production, created ten years ago, is still running, in Japan. Others of his creations are touring elsewhere. Bourne's work, it seems, goes everywhere except New York. So far, we have seen only two of his shows. The "Swan Lake" opened on Broadway in 1998. Now, almost seven years later, his "Play Without Words," a steamy drama of class conflict set in sixties London, is at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

So Bourne comes to us rarely, but whenever he does there is a big, long fuss in the press about whether his work is dance or drama. This is ridiculous. Theatrical dance, throughout its history, has swung back and forth between storytelling and abstraction. For every Marius Petipa there was a Michel Fokine, for every Balanchine an Agnes de Mille, insisting that movement had to "mean" something. In the end, it never mattered. Narrative or abstract, some dance shows were good, and some weren't. But Bourne, for his own reasons, has revived this weary debate. He comes, as he has put it, from "Cockney East London," so he presumably has some feelings about social class. Furthermore, he didn't see his first ballet until he was nineteen, and didn't take his first dance lesson till he was twenty-two, so he may, in the past, have had misgivings about his credentials. In interviews, he has taken on these issues aggressively, casting them in terms of real life versus some other, less vital condition. Dancers, he told Jesse Green, of the *Times*, are narrow, not like him. While they were shut up in a ballet studio, he was "going out and, you know, living a bit"—seeing Fred Astaire movies and M-G-M musicals. As for today's concert dance, it, too, is cloistered, to the extent that it is abstract. "I can't bear it," he said to Green, "when people come forward and just do a turn in the air for no reason." He, by contrast, is a storyteller, an entertainer. One must read between the lines here. Abstract means snobbish, bad. Narrative means democratic, good.

I don't know to what extent these statements are heartfelt. They may just be publicity. Bourne wants a big audience—he wants to be an M-G-M musical. So the talk about movie-deprived dancers and motivationless air turns may be his way of saying, "Come to my show. It's not one of those effete things which the nobs seem to like—it's about life." If that's what he's doing, fine. Whatever works. But if he truly thinks that dance, because it is fundamentally abstract, is inconsequential, then one has to ask why he goes on making it. And so well.

"Play Without Words," in its acidulous look and tone, is based on a number of English films from the nineteen-fifties and sixties, but above all it derives from Joseph Losey's 1963 "The Servant," and it takes its plot from Harold Pinter's screenplay for that chilling movie. Anthony, a young upper-class fellow, has just bought a town house in Chelsea, where he drinks a lot of whiskey neat and necks with his equally well-born fiancée, Glenda. To maintain his new establishment, Anthony has hired a rather creepy manservant, Prentice, who fawns on Anthony and then smirks at him behind his



Michela Meazza, Scott Ambler, Valentina Formenti, and Richard Winsor, in "Play Without Words." Photograph by Max Vadukul.

back. Glenda and Prentice do not like each other. Prentice brings in a second servant, a maid named Sheila, who at first seems a mousy little thing but is soon slithering around the kitchen in a tennis sweater and not much else. She seduces Anthony, who also appears to have something going on with Prentice, who in turn, if I'm not mistaken, is sleeping with Sheila when she is not with Anthony. As for Glenda, she spends a regrettable night with a fifth character, a working-class lad named Speight, who the program says is an old friend of Anthony's. By the end, Glenda has walked out, Anthony is a helpless sot, Prentice and Sheila have taken over the house, and English morals have been blown to smithereens.

As the title of the show announces, all this is done without words—it is a dance, or a movement drama—though it is faithful to Pinter in that it consists primarily of one-on-one encounters. In "The Servant," as in most of Pinter's work, those transactions are full of unspoken meaning; in Bourne's piece, such cargo is even heavier, because there is no speaking at all. The characters look at each other, or don't, and while their faces are doing that, their feet are doing something else—for example, creeping up the other person's pants leg.

But the determining device of "Play Without Words" is that the roles are doubled and tripled. There is not one Anthony; there are three, as there are three Prentices, three Glendas, and two Sheilas. Nor do they alternate. While Prentice A is dressing Anthony A in the morning, Prentices B and C are dressing (or undressing) Anthonys B and C a few feet away. Bourne says that this is a narrative technique. "You may have one couple downstage doing what's really happening," he told the *Times*. "And behind them, another couple, doing what they're thinking. And then you have another couple doing what they did a half-hour later." In fact, however, the three different exchanges usually don't differ much in action. Imagine a split screen, with three panels. In one, Rhett Butler says, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." In the next, he says, "I'm sorry, Scarlett, I don't care anymore." In the third, he pulls off his wedding ring and throws it in the dirt. The upshot is the same; only the tone varies. That's what Bourne's show is like.

Is it confusing? No. At any given moment, you focus on one couple, and if, with your peripheral vision, you take in another as well, the contrast is not disconcerting. Frequently, it is funny. But as Bourne, so insistent on realism, may not have intended, the chief effect of the multiplication of characters is to cast the play into abstraction. If there are three ways that Prentice might dress Anthony in the morning, and three ways that Speight might humiliate Glenda sexually, then the exchange begins to look like a ritual, a pattern, on which these enactments are variations. The other consequence of the role-tripling is complexity. The different pairs refract one another, echo and rhyme with one another. The story is painful, and Pinter meant it to be. He seems to see the English class system as comparable to slavery. Bourne may agree, but in this doubling and tripling of actions he complicates the situation, makes it not just brutal but also comical, sarcastic, and a lot of other things.

Because Bourne is so set on narrative—and maybe also because he spent his youth living the real life, not in a dance studio—the number of his dance moves is limited. Often, actually, what he gives us is not so much dance as carefully crafted movement skits, like Charlie Chaplin's. But even in this genre he can go only so far. The second act of "Play Without Words," which shows us successive subjugations of Anthony by Sheila, of Glenda by Speight, and of Anthony by Prentice, is repetitive. In particular, the sex is repetitive; there's just too much of it, and all in the same tone: teasing, insulting. It's also in the second act that Bourne gets into trouble with his beloved storytelling. Speight, you now realize, doesn't really belong in the play. This flannel-shirted fellow would never have been an "old friend" of Anthony's; he's just been stuck in to add another step to the ladder of social class. (In fact, he seems to have wandered in from "Look Back in Anger.") Also, the show has no real ending. Pinter leaves his hero utterly destroyed—drunk on the floor outside the room where the manservant and the maid are clamorously copulating. Bourne draws back from such a complete demolition: at the end of his piece, Anthony wakes up in a chair, to the sound of trouble in his house. If this is a kinder conclusion, it's still not much of a conclusion. Bourne has said that he made "Play Without Words" in just a few weeks. Maybe that's the explanation.

Nevertheless, this is a serious, witty, mind-nettling show. Some of its contributors should be singled out: Scott Ambler, as the most nuanced Prentice (you can't take your eyes off him); Alan Vincent, as the beefiest and most visceral of the Speights (about two hundred pounds, you figure, and it feels like they're coming straight at you); above all, Lez Brotherston, Bourne's longtime designer. Who could forget his faux-Dior gowns in "Swan Lake"? Glenda's knock-'em-dead beige suit is less spectacular but just as impressive. Finally, the jazz score, by Terry Davies, is wonderful: sometimes ruminative and smoky in that sixties way, but elsewhere trumpetingly dramatic and thus a firm support for the stage action. Bourne is not just a good artist; he knows how to choose other artists and get the utmost out of them.

Bourne is now in the process of becoming a mainstream director. The deconstructed classics are not far behind him—in 2002, he made a "Nutcracker" set in an orphanage—but he is forty-five now, and his naughty days may be coming to an end. He recently choreographed revivals of "My Fair Lady" and "South Pacific." Last year, he co-directed a new "Mary Poppins" for the West End. It's said to be dark, but it's probably not too dark, because it's an enormous hit. (It is scheduled to open on Broadway next year.) From what Bourne has told the press, the only reason he did something as offbeat as "Play Without Words" is that, in 2002, London's National Theatre, looking to bring in younger crowds, put on what it called a "Transformation" season, in which the works didn't have to be commercial; on the contrary, they were supposed to be edgy and experimental. Bourne was asked to contribute, and so he made "Play Without Words."

It is wrong to lament Bourne's departure for the mainstream. You can't complain about Andrew Lloyd Webber and then complain again when more interesting people go into musical theatre. Maybe Bourne will help fix that currently debased form, and inspire others to do the same. I await "Mary Poppins" eagerly. As for Bourne's next project, he's planning a dance show based on "Edward Scissorhands," and I don't know what to think. ♦

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THE ART WORLD

YOUNG FUN

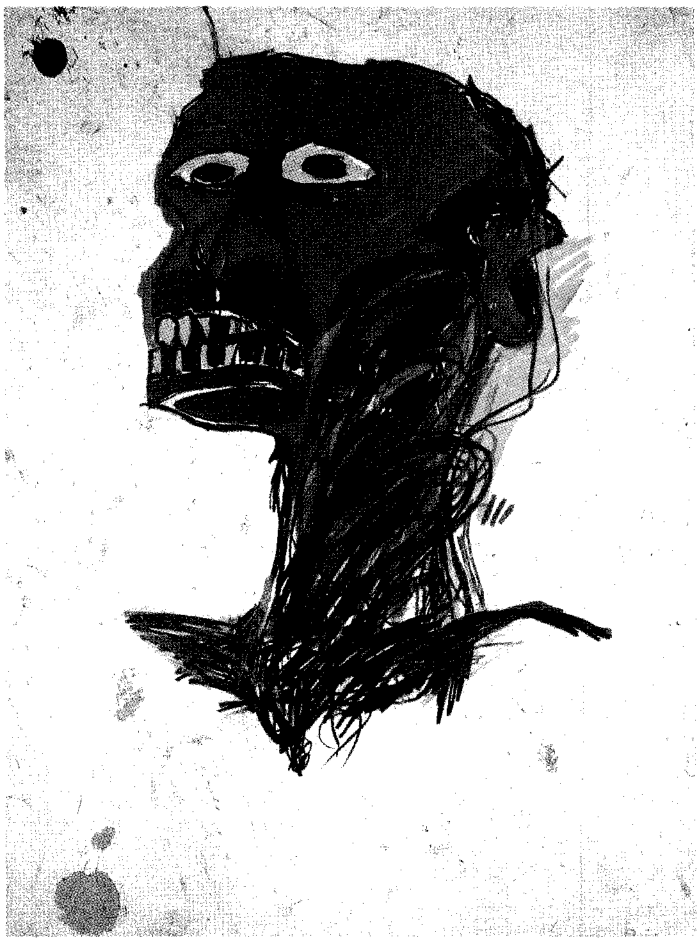
Basquiat's best work.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Jean-Michel Basquiat, the subject of an important, intensely enjoyable retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum, made nearly all of his best paintings, which are very good indeed, at the age of twenty-one, in 1982. He was not mature beyond his years. He expressed attitudes that are distinctly adolescent, when not childish, in a taunting, arch, almost self-parodic style that started going to pieces the moment it came together. Thereby, Basquiat closely resembled a poet who quit writing poetry before the age of twenty: Arthur Rimbaud. A quotation in this show's catalogue from Rimbaud's "A Season in Hell" sent me back to that work, written in 1873, which gave exalted, hilarious, altogether uncanny voice to teen-age narcissism:

> My turn now. The story of one of my insanities. . . . What I liked were: absurd paintings, pictures over doorways, stage sets, carnival backdrops, billboards, bright-colored prints, old-fashioned literature, church Latin, erotic books full of misspellings. . . . I dreamed of Crusades, voyages of discovery that nobody had heard of, republics without histories, religious wars stamped out, revolutions in morals, movements of races and continents. . . . I invented colors for the vowels!—A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green. . . . I turned silences and nights into words. What was unutterable, I wrote down. I made the whirling world stand still.

Basquiat was like that, right down to the sprightly tastes and the romance of recondite erudition. His paintings bristle with antic self-instruction in history, anatomy, mythology, and education itself, as when he proposes an ideal order of knowledge: "1. sports 2. opera 3. weapons." His innumerable masklike heads exhaustively anthropologize a tribal civilization that never was. And he regularly gave color to sound, finding painterly equivalents for the effects on him of his musical heroes—Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix. As for the deliberate "derangement of all the senses" that Rimbaud recommended to poets, Basquiat was only too game.



A fresh turn to the myth of the poète maudit. "Untitled" (1982).

COURTESY BROOKLYN MUSEUM

He was famous in the art world by the beginning of 1982, and rich soon afterward. Drugs, drink, sex, and bad behavior briefly fuelled, then devastated, his genius. He died of a drug overdose in 1988—"tragically," it says in a wall text at the show which a friend of mine testifies to having misread, at first glance, as "traditionally." Indeed, Basquiat's life and career adhered to a classical (in our day, tabloid) trajectory of rise, fall, and doom, though with an unusually sunny epilogue. Not only do his paintings now sell for ever more millions at auction; serious critical appreciation and art-historical validation, withheld from him in life, are coming around. Basquiat turns out to be the essential American Neo-Expressionist painter of the early nineteen-eighties, the one who made the most of that time's revival—or pastiche, or lampoon—of long-lapsed and despised styles of showy subjectivity in modern art. Simply, he brought lyrical truth to a movement that swam and, ultimately, drowned in facetiousness. Simultaneous references, in one painting, to anatomy drawings by da Vinci and to the steel-driving man John Henry precipitate a funny, unfeigned paean to the literally and figuratively muscular in life, art, and legend. In terms of style, what Julian Schnabel performed with operatic bombast, David Salle with theatrical gall, and any number of others with academic irony, Basquiat brought off with spontaneous conviction. Whatever historical modes stirred him—Expressionism, "primitivism," art brut, Pop—lived anew, for a spell, at his hands, as did the influence of paragons including Picasso, Dubuffet, Pollock, and Twombly. Meanwhile, his unhappy story gave a fresh, perhaps valedictory turn to the myth of the *poète maudit*, a revelatory, self-immolating figure of terrible delight.

Basquiat was born in Brooklyn to a Haitian father—a successful accountant, with whom he had a difficult relationship—and a sensitive, emotionally unstable Puerto Rican mother, who nurtured his talent from an early age. He left home and high school at the age of seventeen and got himself discovered by the art world as the gnomic graffitist SAMO (for "same old"). "Pay for soup / Build a fort / Set that on fire," went a typically waifish seething, and catchily lettered tag. He strove to be a dandy, and was adept at charming or humiliating others while remaining opaquely cool. (On first meeting him, I mentioned the apparent influence on him of Dubuffet. "Who?" he asked, with a look that booked me on a train to Siberia.) His first studio works were the sensation of "New York/New Wave," a seminal 1981 group show at P.S. 1. The poet Rene Ricard published an influential essay about him (along with Keith Haring), titled "The Radiant Child," in *Artforum*. Basquiat's talent and persona might have been made to order for a moment when the prestige of international Neo-Expressionism trickled down to the streets and clubs of the East Village, and social mobility became talismanic in art even as it declined in society. The hundreds of paintings that he created in 1982 mirrored the roaring spirit of a time that, after the depressive seventies, had rediscovered the bliss of art, fashion, tremendous amounts of money in rapid circulation, and other forms of concerted indulgence.

The key artistic quality of Basquiat's best work is a seeming paradox. Ostensibly a graphic artist—relentlessly lettering and cartooning, filling surfaces with sketchy forms, and using color, if at all, mainly to fill in drawn shapes—he is in fact a painter to the core, always concerned with a picture's physical character and immediate impact. Every element interacts with every other and with the pictorial space, which develops rhythmic ins and outs and hollows and bumps across the surface, in the way of Cubism. Visually, lines work less as demarcations of the surface than as skinny shapes wriggling atop it. The longer you look at a good Basquiat—and you have to do it in person, because the bodily scale of his gestural marks is crucial—the jazzy push and pull of small and large masses, dark and light tones, and cool and warm colors becomes more, rather than less, complex. Even when a picture is made up only of words printed in black, like his early transcriptions of SAMO graffiti to paper and canvas, the visual impression may be coloristic—an effect of the brushed or paint-sticked lines activating rather than merely occupying their off-white grounds, which breathe and glow. You can't learn to do this stuff. It's about talent, served by commensurate desire and concentration—and joy. Plainly, after 1982 painting was increasingly less fun for Basquiat. Pictures become forced, congested, and inert. Nothing moves, in either sense of the word.

It is in the nature of all styles to burn out, but none perish as abruptly and irrecoverably as the precocious. Basquiat was in for a painful artistic crisis even if he could have kicked drugs and developed choirboy habits. As it was, the toll of his bad choices was exacerbated by exploitative dealers and collectors, corrupt companions, and the inevitable backlash that follows extravagant public success. (Would Rimbaud have finessed his looming difficulties by walking away from poetry if he had been as thoroughly rewarded with money, acclaim, and unlimited lovers? No.) Basquiat's is one of the great horrible American lives, already told in a fine biography by Phoebe Hoban (mordantly subtitled "A Quick Killing in Art") and in a delectable movie by Schnabel, starring Jeffrey Wright and, in a revelatory interpretation, David Bowie as Andy Warhol—whose relationship to Basquiat was both calculating and kind. The Brooklyn show, which lacks some of the artist's best paintings, hardly exhausts a subject that interests in no end of ways. As a black artist, Basquiat isn't the Jackie Robinson of the American art world—which, until quite recently, was woefully all but lily-white—so much as its Willie Mays, abolishing forever racial identity as remarkable in the field's top rank. Meanwhile, he had fun with that tension. His witty painting of heads redolent at once of Picasso and of Africa might be seen to close a circle of appropriation that began when the Spaniard visited the Ethnographic Museum (now the Musée de l'Homme), in Paris, in 1907. Basquiat's humor shares with Rimbaud's a particular, visionary wisdom: that of the world surveyed by one too young to be answerable for anything in it. ♦

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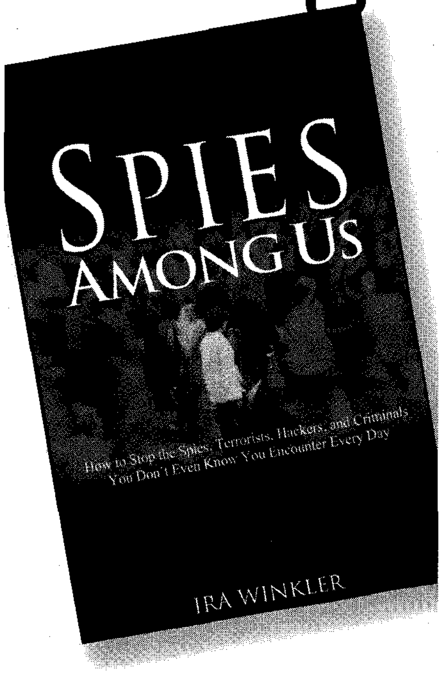
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THE THEATRE

GLASS HOUSES

A delicate reimagining of Tennessee Williams's classic.

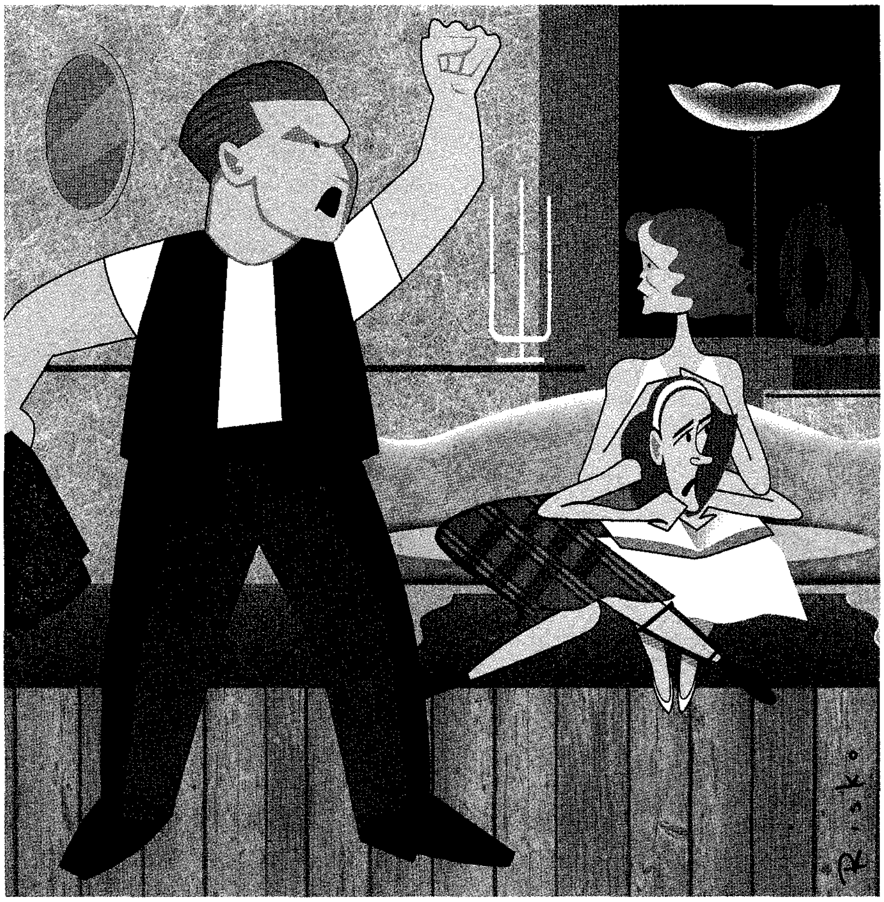
BY HILTON ALS

"It seems like yesterday"—a lovely phrase that may occur to you more than once if you're fortunate enough to catch David Leveaux's brilliant staging of Tennessee Williams's "Glass Menagerie" (at the Barrymore). It is hardly surprising that the experience of watching Williams's delicate "memory play," as he called the 1944 masterwork that was his first success in the theatre, should evoke images from one's own past. For generations of readers, especially those who discovered Williams as teen-agers, the playwright has been the first to decode the dynamics of the family and, most important, of the relationship that more or less defines all boys—the connection between a mother and her son.

"The Glass Menagerie" 's matriarch, Amanda Wingfield (played here by the electrifying Jessica Lange) is an optimist, staunchly defended against the disturbances that man inflicts upon man. It is her avoidance of the exigencies of life—and her steely determination to see the world as she imagines it—that builds within her the peculiar tension against which her son, Tom (Christian Slater), tries over and over to bulwark himself. As you can tell from Tom Pye's astonishing set, which gallantly interprets Williams's lyrically vague stage directions ("The scene is memory and is . . . nonrealistic. . . . The interior is therefore rather dim and poetic") to produce the Wingfields' tenement apartment in Depression-era St. Louis, Amanda has found it enormously difficult to make the transition from her genteel rural past to her shabby, poverty-stricken urban present. In such situations, a son can do one of two things: he can try to create another, more comfortable reality for his mother by making a success of himself in his chosen field, or he can leave her altogether—and then spend his life looking for mother figures everywhere. Tom, who is the play's narrator, and Williams's stand-in—Williams's name was Thomas, before he changed it to the more florid Tennessee, in 1938—knows that he will forever be locked between these two roles: that of the good son who stays and the bad son who flees, as his father did before him. (Tom refers to his missing father as a telephone repairman who "fell in love with long distance." Absence was the other woman.) In his opening monologue, Tom describes the only other male figure in the play—the Gentleman Caller (Josh Lucas), who is meant to court his crippled sister, Laura (the lovely Sarah Paulson)—as "an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. . . . He is the long delayed but always expected something that we live for." A poet working in a shoe warehouse, Tom is not the most mobile of characters—he is a dreamer, whose greatest act of rebellion is getting fired from his job for "writing a poem on the lid of a shoebox." In other words, we do not think of Tom as a tough, masculine force in the world; it falls to the Gentleman Caller to be the bull in this menagerie of romantics.

How, then, to explain Christian Slater's hunky, shambling hero? At first glance, he looks more like a character from a D. H. Lawrence novel than like a budding Tennyson. But, in short order, Slater proves that he's more than willing to bend his stocky, powerful frame to the metal of Williams's breathtaking cadences. Like the other actors, Slater surprises us with the sacrifices he's willing to make for the role; not once do we feel as if he is just another movie star turning a trick on Broadway, or that the play needs *him* in order to survive. He's a relatively young actor, who is still hungry to learn what he doesn't know about himself.

That kind of humility distinguishes the three other performers as well, two of whom have also made their names in film. It is exciting to see the lengths to which they go to inhabit their characters here—and the extent to which Leveaux has been able to cut them off, quite lit-



Christian Slater, Jessica Lange, and Sarah Paulson in "The Glass Menagerie."

ROBERT RISKO

erally, from their familiar screen personas. Pye's ingenious set—the equally strong and poetic lighting is by Natasha Katz—has, among other things, a curtain that separates the characters from the living room proper. (It also, of course, symbolizes the curtains that separate our memories from "real life.") Leveaux, at various times, places the characters in silhouette behind the curtain, forcing them—and the audience—to rely on the timbre of their voices, rather than on their faces, to impart meaning: a theatrical radio.

No other actor's voice is as convincing as Jessica Lange's, with its mixture of nervousness, charm, and strident need. Her Amanda is a radical reinterpretation—and such a revealing one that she actually makes you see "The Glass Menagerie" in a different way. Amanda has always been played as something of an overweight frump; one suspects that the actresses who followed in the plump footsteps of the legendary Laurette Taylor—she was the first, great Amanda—fashioned their performances on hers. But Lange's former Southern belle is no dowdy hysteric; she makes good use of her fine, slim body and her beautiful elocution—there's plenty of vitriol in her sorghum. While some may think Lange too young for the role, she uses that discrepancy to excellent effect. Her Amanda is never too far from the plantation, which makes her memories of it as fresh as a wound. Lange seems to have gone directly to the source when researching her performance; it's impossible, watching her, not to think of Williams's mother, Edwina, who, like Lange, was lithe and piquant. Lange perfectly conveys what Gore Vidal described in a 1976 essay on the playwright—which remains the best account of his life and work available. Recalling a lunch that he shared with Williams and Edwina, Vidal writes:

> Miss Edwina is every inch the Amanda of "The Glass Menagerie." In fact, so powerful is Tennessee's creation that in the presence of Miss Edwina one does not listen to her but only to what he has made of her.
>
> "I had forty gentlemen callers that day," she says complacently. We are having dinner in the restaurant of the Robert Clay Hotel in Miami. Delicately she holds a fork with a shrimp on it. Fork and shrimp proceed slowly to her mouth while Tennessee and I stare, hypnotized not only by the constant flow of conversation but by the never-eaten shrimp for, just as she is about to take the first bite, yet another anecdote wells up from deep inside her . . . ah, *solipsistic* brain and the fork returns to the plate, the shrimp untouched. "Tom, remember when that little dog took the hat with the plume and ran all 'round the yard . . . ?" This is also from "The Glass Menagerie." Tennessee nervously clears his throat. Again the shrimp slowly rises to the wide straight mouth which resembles nothing so much as the opening to a miniature letter box—one designed for engraved invitations only. But once again the shrimp does not arrive. "Tom, do you remember . . . ?"
>
> Tennessee clears his throat again. "*Mother, eat your shrimp.*"
>
> "Why," counters Miss Edwina, "do you keep making that funny sound in your throat?"
>
> "Because, Mother, when you destroy someone's life you must expect certain nervous disabilities."

One of the many unrealistic hopes that Amanda harbors is that of securing a husband for her damaged daughter. And when she asks Tom to bring an eligible young man home, he complies. It is in drawing out Tom's complicated identification with Laura—which resembles Williams's with his mentally disturbed sister, Rose—that Leveaux accomplishes his deepest and darkest bit of staging. In one scene, Laura lies across her brother as he sleeps; in another, Tom helps Laura with her leg brace as if he were slipping a garter from a bride's thigh. Of course, Williams went on to write more explicitly of his relationship with Rose, most notably in the vastly underrated 1971 play "Out Cry," which Leveaux must have read (along with a great deal of biographical information) in order to give this group of Wingfields such incredible resonance. When Tom falls in love with long distance, too, leaving Laura to her inner world, the heart breaks. "The Glass Menagerie" is steeped in the guilt a man feels at leaving the women of his life behind so that he can become the man he needs to be. Slater, Lange, and Paulson execute this parting with the grim beauty one finds in Williams's description of his own haunting in a 1956 letter to a friend:

> I was . . . very angry at you because you said such a cruel thing about my ravaged sister, that she was "just a body." . . . She isn't any more just a body than you and I are, and if you looked at her, at her tortured face, and observed her desperate effort to . . . [face] the person she loved most as a girl, and to whom she was closest, and knew that she was a lunatic being visited by him in a bughouse, a plush-lined snake pit, I don't see how you could call her just a body. Madness doesn't mean the cease of personality, it simply means that the personality has lost touch with what we call reality. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

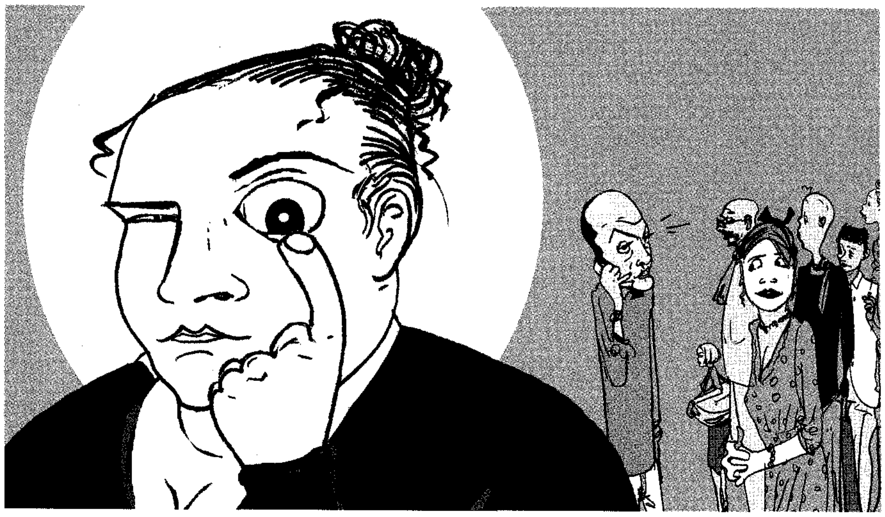
TWO WOMEN

"Look at Me" and "The Upside of Anger."

BY DAVID DENBY

At its core, "Look at Me" ("Comme une Image"), the wonderful new film by the team of Agnès Jaoui and Jean-Pierre Bacri, is a modern-day fairy tale: cruel father, unloved daughter, young stepmother. But the movie is about so many other things as well that one hesitates to describe it in outline. Bacri writes and acts, Jaoui writes, acts, and directs, and together this couple has mastered the art of complex narrative. They have a story to tell, but they go so far into manners, quirks, and undertones that we feel, at the end of their films, that we have understood not just a dramatized anecdote but an entire way of life. Their earlier collaboration, "The Taste of Others" (2000), featured an obtuse businessman (Bacri) who, bored one night at a provincial production of Racine, is suddenly startled, and then ravished, by the sound of an actress's voice. At a bar near the theatre, he hangs out with the actress (she speaks in low, throbbing tones) and the other members of her troupe, a snobby, gossipy lot who laugh in his face and refuse, as a matter of principle, to accept him. "The Taste of Others" was an exploration of collective narcissism—the way people are drawn to one another by shared (and exclusionary) tastes in seriousness and in humor. It was also about love, which sometimes busts up the comfortable patterns of life.

In "Look at Me," the art that ravishes is music. The cranky heroine, a twenty-year-old music student named Lolita (Marilou Berry), comes closest to happiness when she sings Monteverdi or Schubert with a small choral group. Lolita is the grievously overweight daughter of a Parisian novelist and publisher, Étienne Cassard (Bacri)—a big shot who is so churlishly self-absorbed that he experiences everyone else in his life, including his daughter and his young wife, as so many gnats landing on the surface of his awareness. Lolita wants Étienne's love, or at least his attention, but he's outraged by her appearance and either ignores her or puts her down. Around this father-daughter vacuum, Jaoui and Bacri assemble the elements of the Parisian publishing and music worlds, including Lolita's teacher, Sylvia (Jaoui), and Sylvia's surly novelist husband, Pierre (Laurent Grevill), who has a surprise success with one of his books and is abruptly taken up by the all-powerful Étienne. The Jaoui-Bacri theme this time is not narcissism but something more primal: the varieties of egocentricity and the unconscious selfishness that can cut people off from those they are closest to. Étienne is the villain of the piece, but the condition is shown to be universal. "Look at Me" is a tender, indignant, but also very worldly movie.



Marilou Berry, as Lolita, holds our interest while remaining down in the dumps.

ISTVAN BANYAI

Jaoui, who is forty, and Bacri, thirteen years older, worked separately as actors for years and then jointly as screenwriters. What they've developed in their own movies is a perception of the commonplace workings of a business and social existence in which the people most worth caring about are cheerlessly stranded, trapped in solitude by their needs and wants. Jaoui, in her second time out as a director, may have produced a more openly emotional and contentious palette than before—there's rage and tears in "Look at Me," and some of the scenes are so volatile that they come close to farce. But another part of the comedy is produced by a Jaoui-Bacri specialty that most filmmakers would avoid as undramatic—the odd, grating little habits of friends, like the nervous compulsion to say everything twice, or the inability to admit an error, or, for that matter, the tendency to get upset by such faults. "Hell is other people," Sartre said, and he may well have been thinking of the prickliness of the Parisian bourgeoisie, which Jaoui and Bacri seem to understand all too well. "Look at Me" may be the first major film in which French irritability is a major theme.

Marilou Berry is short and stocky, with a big chest, arched eyebrows, and a finely cut mouth—a Modigliani face (as Jaoui has said) but without the elongated Modigliani body. As Lolita, she pulls off the daunting task of holding our interest while remaining forever down in the dumps. Lolita is not a very likable girl. Too heavy to get past the bouncer at a Paris disco, she's assaulted by beauty snobs on all sides; over the years, her pride has taken so many hits that she treats other people as badly as she's treated herself, repelling her beautiful stepmother (Virginie Desarnauts), whose anxious good will she misinterprets as condescension, and holding at arm's length a handsome, crestfallen young man from an immigrant family, Sébastien (Keine Bouhiza), who identifies with her as an outsider. Lolita wants to be loved not because she's the daughter of the famous Étienne Cassard but because she's herself, only she's too angry to let anyone get close. Jaoui's attitude toward this unlikely heroine is balanced between sympathy and realism. Some victims, we are meant to feel, can't stop making things worse for themselves.

Lolita certainly has one of the most unpleasant fathers in the history of the movies. The thickset Bacri has dark eyes, a mouth that collapses into a tiny purse, a balding pate, and a heavy forehead. As Étienne, he speaks rapidly, contemptuously, drawing out his ill temper into long arias. The miracle of Bacri's performance is that he enjoys Étienne's rudeness so much that we can't wait to see how this big baby will disgrace himself next. By the end of the movie, we realize that we've seen a classic study of self-centeredness. Étienne won't look at people when they speak; he interrupts and corrects, pulls every subject back to himself, and then suddenly plays the victim—self-pity is one of the resources of egotism that he can rely on. As Jaoui and Bacri tell it, Étienne has become a petty tyrant because people let him get away with it. The movie is both an implicit protest against the blindness of power and an equally fervent protest against the acquiescence of men and women who are too weak or too compromised to stand up for themselves—that is, most people.

The way out for Lolita is music. Jaoui (a singer herself) points the way by playing the music teacher as a rather stern moralist. Yet no one, not even a priestess of art, is idealized in the Jaoui-Bacri view. Only art itself is idealized. There is enchantment not only in the music, with its ecstatic volleys of "amen"s, but in the innocent, awkward ardor of the young people in Lolita's choral group. Jaoui took a big risk in putting classical music at the center of the film, but the risk pays off: a scene in a Romanesque church near Étienne's country house surges with the performers' pleasure in the music and in themselves. Dedication to art is the ego-satisfying end to the more destructive sides of egotism—a specialized prescription, to be sure, but one that the rest of us can use as fans and music lovers. Jaoui floats the music over a rapturous scene of Lolita, escaping from her father at last, riding a bicycle in the moonlight in search of the boyfriend she has offended. Salvation is right in front of her, and there's a chance that she might, at last, learn what it is and grasp it.

Joan Allen has eyes like lasers, neck cords as tight as stanchions, and the tensed body of a lioness on the hunt, all of which have made her highly effective, even a little scary, as a First Lady, a senator, a C.I.A. station chief. But who would have guessed that Allen could use her masklike face and taut body for domestic comedy? In "The Upside of Anger," she's extraordinary as the disgusted Terry Wolfmeyer, a fiftyish suburban housewife abandoned by her husband. Prowling her damask-and-leather palace in a pink housecoat, Terry starts drinking early in the day, and Allen gives her a swaying walk and a laughable baleful scowl beneath fully coiffed hair. Allen lurches into rooms but then speaks with the weird overexplicitness of an alcoholic trying to maintain control. Life won't live up to Terry's angry commands, and she's a mess herself, a borderline hypocrite who loves her four teen-age daughters (Erika Christensen, Evan Rachel Wood, Keri Russell, and Alicia Witt) but can't stop herself from competing with them.

As this matron on the loose, Allen is rancorously funny—the sheer pleasure of telling people off bursts through her self-control. Terry violates her own standards, but she has been liberated at last, and so has Joan Allen. Kevin Costner, as Denny Davis, a retired baseball player living nearby, sidles into the movie belly first; he meanders around the sets, recedes into the background, and cushions Allen's anger with old-pro assurance. Denny seems a little fuzzy at first, but he's not stupid, just lost in many layers of self-contempt, an ex-star who signs baseballs and does a lazy radio show on a local station. Booze halfway dissolves the differences between the two of them; they carry on a skittish affair in the gaps between Terry's attempts to raise her daughters. Written and directed by Mike Binder, the movie is leisurely but not slack. Binder, who earlier made such forgettable pictures as "Blankman" and "The Sex Monster," may be one of the few male directors around who take an active interest in what women are feeling. He even offers himself as a prime sacrifice to female rage: he plays a sleazebag friend of Denny's who pursues one of Terry's daughters. He's riding high until he has a confrontation with the maternal hellion herself, who takes his measure and abruptly knocks him to the ground. ♦

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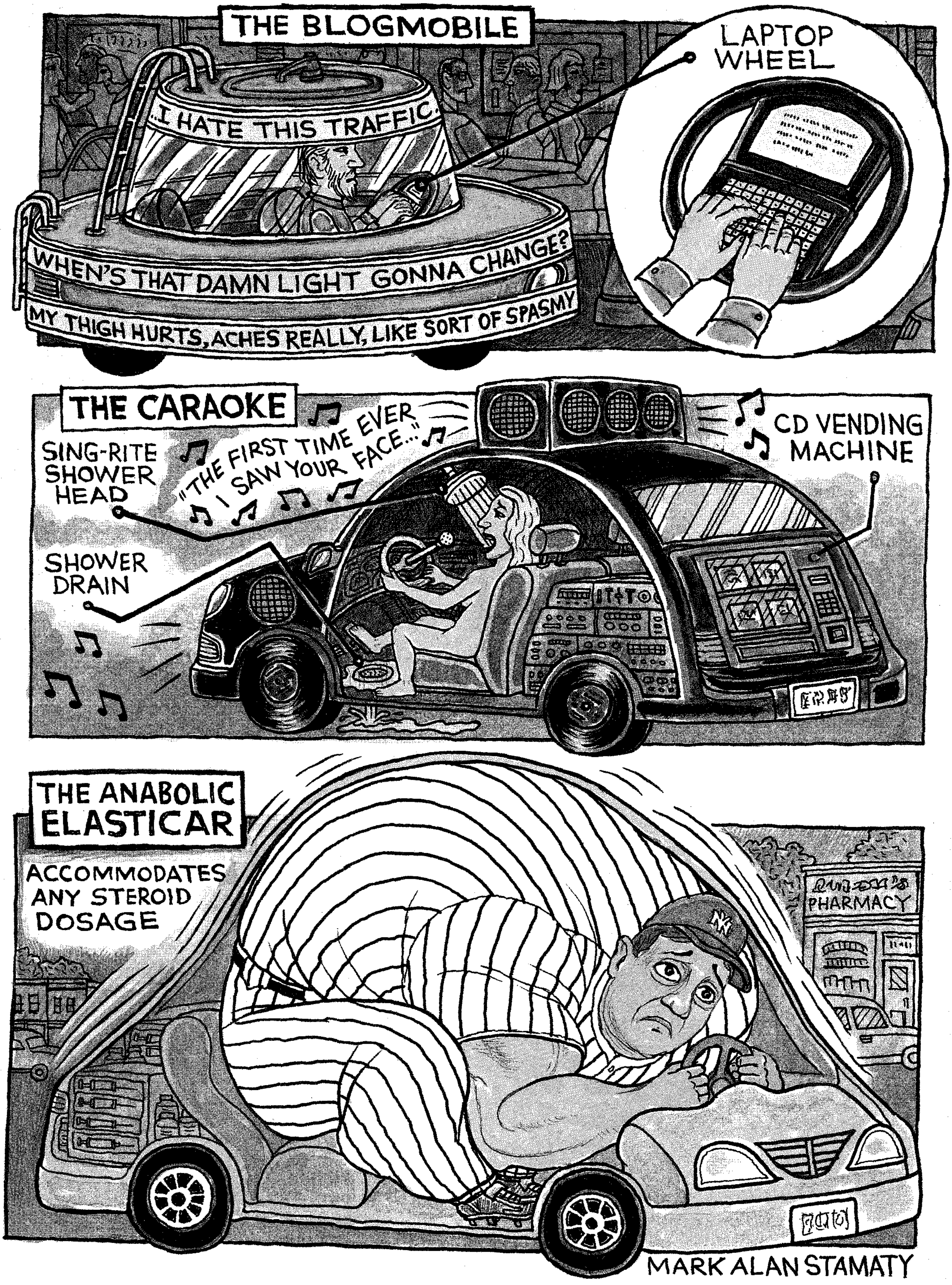
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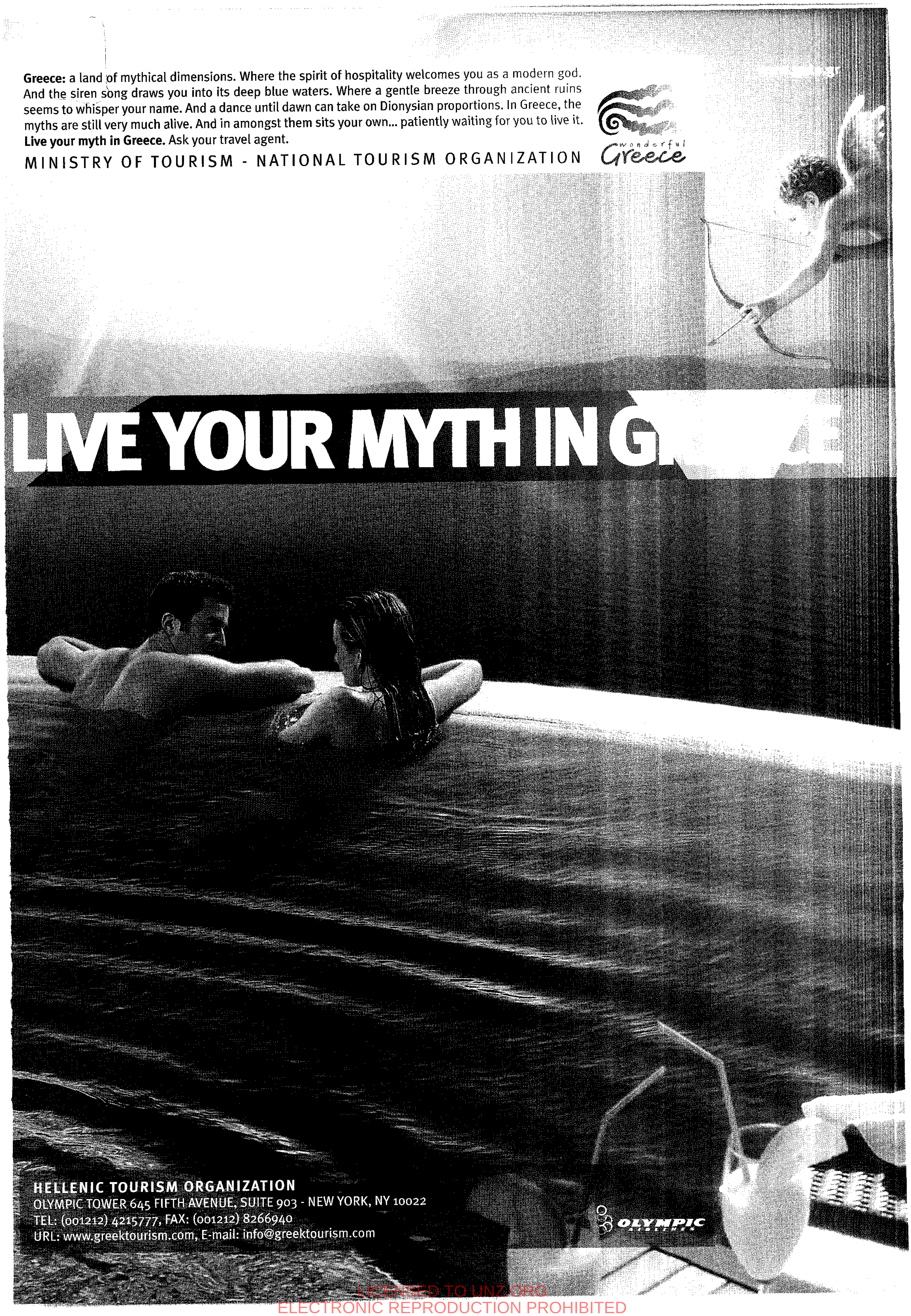

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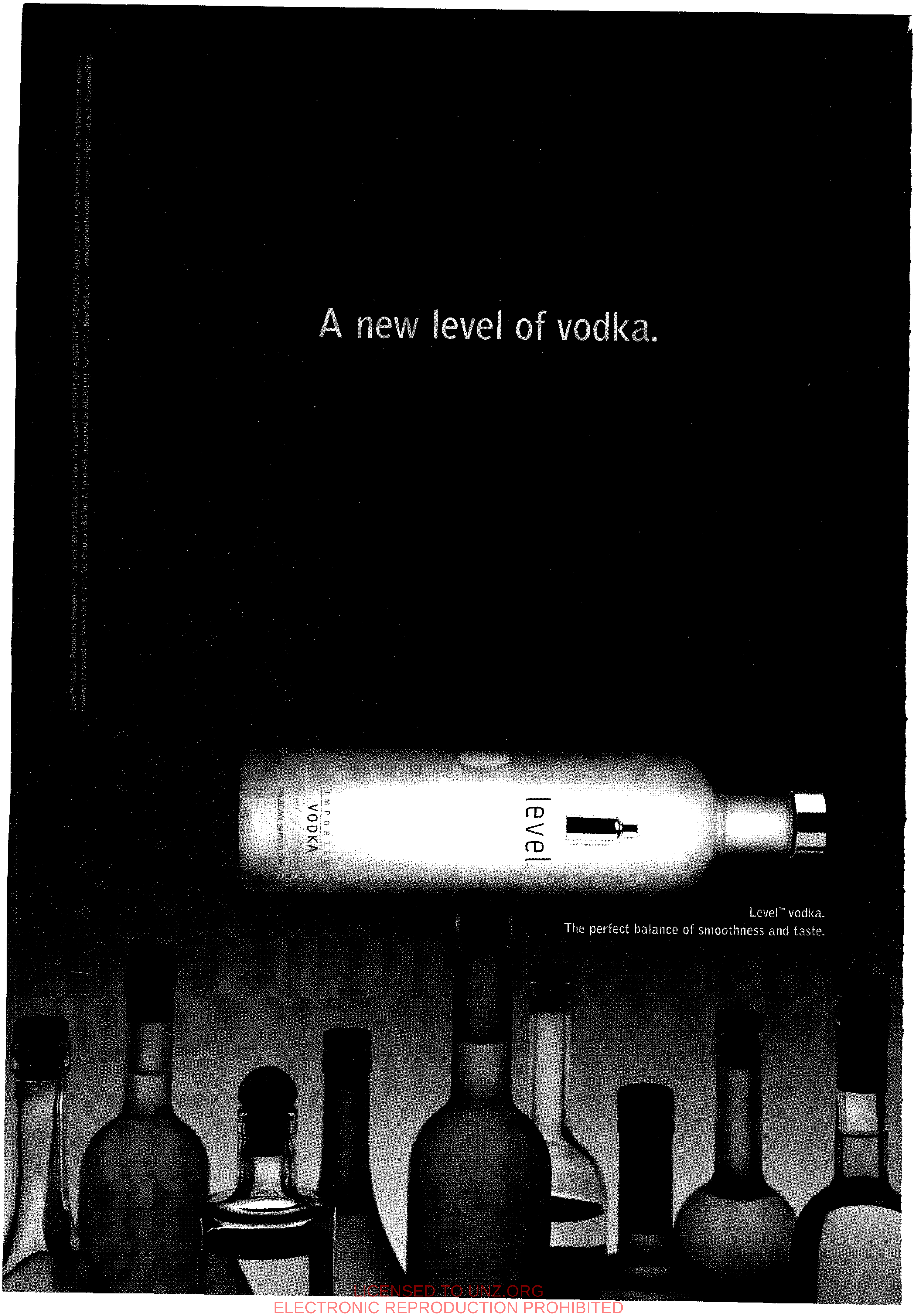
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